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SCIENCE FICTION • FANTASY FANTASTIC

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Editorial

Starting with this issue we want to introduce a new editorial policy. This page is as much the reader's as any other in the magazine. Therefore, along with editorials by our staff, we're going to run material from the ranks of the pros and general readership. If you have an idea for a guest editorial send in your suggestion—or preferably, write it yourself. Keep all submissions within four to six hundred words, and if in the opinion of the editors your piece will interest the readership you may well see it in print. As for subject matter—anything meaningful and germane to sf or fantasy will do, which means just about anything. (Address your submissions to Guest Editorial, Ultimate Publishing Co., Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Only double spaced type-written scripts will be considered and don't forget to enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope to insure the return of unused material.)

This time, we'll take a peek at the sudden resurgence of interest in large budget sf and fantasy motion pictures here and abroad. Stanley Kubrick (*Dr. Strangelove*) is at work on a Cinerama called *2001-a Space Odyssey* with a budget which can go to twenty million. Then there's the seven million dollar *The Fantastic Voyage* released by 20th Century-Fox with a serialized version by Isaac Asimov in the "Saturday Evening Post." Universal has scheduled Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451*. Paramount has *Seconds* (John Frankenheimer) in production. Columbia is going with Frank Capras *Marooned*, and the Jules Verne story **LIGHT AT THE END OF THE WORLD**. MGM is doing one based on the Wylie novel, *The Disappearance*. And Arthur Clarke's *Skyport*, and one called *Deadly Bees* is scheduled in Britain, along with *The Projected Man*.

It seems then, that fantasy and sf have finally come of age as far as the mass media are concerned. Where else, in an era which wants to reduce everything to the lowest common denominator, can you find the appeal of bona fide heroes in the old tradition? Plus prophecy. Plus social commentary. Plus people. Plus... Well, plus entertainment.

We're hoping that in trying to reach the mass audience the film makers don't destroy the material they're using. From what we've seen of the advance material it looks as if they won't. For, hopefully, they've finally begun to realize that fantasy and sf have been of age for some time and that Bradbury, et al, turn out stories worthy of an adult audience and treatment.

We'll keep you posted and review the films as they're released. Perhaps one way or another the thousands of feet of film about to be unleashed will swell the ranks of those interested in our favorite field. — S.C.

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All Chad Oliver fans—that means all of us, naturally—have their favorite yarn by the man who specializes in science fiction with an anthropological theme. Ours happens to be "Artifact"—that masterful short about Narn the Martian, who wore skins but was intelligent enough to fly a helicopter after only fifteen minutes at the controls. Yours might well be "Final Exam" or "Hardly Worth Mentioning" (both of which ran here first). But this new Oliver story could change all that—because it obviously belongs way up there with Chad's very best—all of it beautifully written, brilliantly plotted, and suspenseful to the very last word.

JUST LIKE A MAN CHAD OLIVER

Illustrated By Gray Morrow

THE storm hit the aircraft with shocking suddenness.

The great red sun of Pollux disappeared. The blue sky vanished. A solid wall of turbulent black clouds struck the ship with the impact of a massive metal fist. Sheets of wind-driven rain rattled like hail against the cabin windows. Jagged forks of blinding white light split the sky, and thunder cracked and boomed with nerve-shattering intensity.

The storm was nothing special.

It would hardly have rated a line in a regular survey report. It was just an ordinary cloudburst, a gully-washer of the sort common enough back on Earth. It was a good one, a frog-choker, but nothing really unusual.

It got the job done, though.

It picked the airship up and threw it. The ship was a small one, a slow copter-and-prop job of the kind normally used for close-in survey work, and it couldn't handle the wind. It tossed and

blew like a leaf in a hurricane.

The three men in the ship weren't even strapped down. They had been scanning the forest below, trusting to their computer to fly the ship. None of them had seen the storm coming. When it hit they were thrown against the cabin walls as though they had been hurled from catapults.

"Hellfire!" gasped Alston Lane. He crawled through the bucking cabin and pulled himself into the pilot's seat. "What the devil hit us—a mountain?" He grabbed the controls.

Anthony Morales tried to steady himself against his chart table. "Whatever it was," he said, "don't try to hit it back."

Roger Pennock, the biologist, was sprawled out full length on the cabin floor, his body flopping about like a fish out of water. He was still conscious but he was definitely hurt. Tony Morales reached out with one hand and tried to steady him.

Alston Lane fought the controls. He wanted to lift the ship over the storm, but it was like attempting to float a lead sinker. He was a big man, and a powerful one, but his strength was useless now. The howling wind buffeted the little ship with hammer blows. He had no choice except to run with the current. He could see nothing in front of him except a wild blackness split with broken white trees of lightning. The

JUST LIKE A MAN



heavy rain was a hissing river on his windshield, and the thunder struck at him like the cracking of a monstrous whip.

There was a sudden explosion of light, an instantaneous clap of thunder. The ship lurched in the air. There was a sharp smell of ozone.

Alston felt the flabbiness in the controls. He couldn't handle the ship, couldn't even keep it level. He still had plenty of air under him but he was losing altitude. He checked his copter blades. They did not respond. He had his prop but that was all. He could not possibly land, not in the middle of a forest with that storm whistling around him.

He didn't think he could fly out of it, either.

Alston Lane started to sweat.

"Tony," he said. He spoke loudly but clearly, resisting the impulse to scream. "Can Roger get to the radio?"

"Don't think so. He's coming around very quickly, but —"

"Haven't got much time. You had better handle it yourself. Get on that thing and call home plate. Give them a position fix and tell them we may have to ditch."

"Position fix," muttered Tony Morales. "Are you kidding?" He left the relative security of the chart table and lunged for the radio seat. He worked fast. He wasn't as good as Roger, but all

of them could handle the equipment.

The ship lurched again as though it had hit some invisible object in the sky. Something cracked.

"Radio's out," Tony called finally. His voice sounded very thin.

"Great," said Alston. "Ain't modern science wonderful?" The aircraft reared under him like a living thing. He checked carefully. They were still losing altitude. The storm was as fierce as ever. "Roger?"

"I'm back with you," the biologist said weakly. "What the hell—"

"Can you jump, Rog?"

"If I have to." Roger Pennock sounded anything but enthusiastic.

Alston wasn't too keen on the idea himself. Even on Pollux Five, which was as close to a twin of Earth as man had yet found, the most basic rule of survey work was to stay with the ship if at all possible. The world below them, however familiar, was no bed of roses. Sure, the air was fine, the gravity was Earth-normal. There were no supermen to fight, no monsters left over from some creative nightmare. Still, there were problems. Some of the great rain forests were thick and impenetrable. The open grasslands were prowled by packs of catlike carnivores; the men had

had to shoot hundreds of them before they could establish their base. There were rivers, thick and swollen . . .

Pollux Five was by no means an open book yet, either. A planet is a big place. It is one thing to map a world from the air, and it is something else to go down there and poke around. There was only one small base on the planet, and that was a good five hundred miles away. Pollux Five still held its share of surprises. In twenty years as an ecologist on four different worlds, Alston Lane had learned to expect the unexpected.

It didn't take something with *ALIEN* stamped all over it to kill a man. Men had died quite successfully on Earth for a long, long time. A big cat could do the job very nicely.

So could a plane crash.

Alston did not want to leave the ship. He knew it was dangerous. But if there were an alternative, he couldn't see it. If they stuck with the ship, they were headed for a smash-up that would be a corker. If they jumped, their floaters would probably land them safely.

They had filed a flight plan, of course. Survey ships do not just hare off into the unknown with a crew of transplanted soda-jerks singing jolly songs of high adventure. Unhappily, it was also true that survey ships were no-

torious for making slight deviations from their anticipated courses—say a few hundred miles or so. If the biologist saw something interesting, he wanted to get a good look at it. If the resource cartographer spotted an unusual formation, he wanted to get in close. Yes, and the ecologist might get intrigued by a pattern of vegetation, a twist in a river, a scattering of a herd of grazers...

Nevertheless, the boys at home plate would know *approximately* where they were. The automatic beam signals should have been operating at least until the storm hit. They might have to hold out for a day or two down there, but surely they would be picked up before long—

Unless. . .

There was another burst of white light, another shocking explosion of thunder that rocked the ship.

Alston smelled smoke, heard a crackling, licking noise—

"End of the line," he yelled. "Everybody out. Keep together!"

The port slid open. The roar of the storm was suddenly very loud and very near.

The three men jumped into the darkness.

The aircraft kept going somehow, limping through the wild lightning-streaked sky.

The men started down with the rain, falling toward the waiting world of Pollux Five.

They were lucky.

They came down in open savanna country, missing the great trees of the rain forest by nearly a mile. They landed close together, and they were unhurt.

The three men huddled together in the driving rain and waited. There was nothing else to do. Gradually, the storm blew itself out. The rain eased off into a misty drizzle and then stopped entirely. Within two hours the black clouds had broken, and patches of warm blue sky appeared above the dripping grass. The reddish sun came out, sinking now toward the western horizon. The world smelled fresh and clean, and the sound of thunder was faint and faraway.

Alston Lane stripped off his sodden shirt and wrung it out to dry. The sun felt good on his bare skin. His gray-flecked brown hair was plastered down around his face, and he had a cut on his right leg. His tall, lean body ached in every muscle. He was damned glad just to be alive, but he had no illusions about the pickle he was in.

They were five hundred miles away from the base. They were on a planet that was largely unexplored, except from the air. They might be picked up within a few hours. Then again, it was entirely possible that they would not be picked up at all.

The stock of equipment.

"Tony. Did you get a gun?"

Tony Morales—small, wiry, mercurial—managed a smile. "No gun, Alston, I grabbed a couple of maps. There wasn't much time—"

"Rog?"

The biologist—balding, a bit overweight, slow and cautious in his actions—shook his head. Ruefully, he held up a small emergency packet. The thing contained basic medicines, four mini-flares, a week's supply of food capsules. "I got one of these. I wasn't thinking too clearly, I'm afraid. I just grabbed the first thing I saw and jumped."

Alston fumbled in his pocket and produced a singularly unimpressive knife. He carried it to clean out his pipe, which he was already beginning to miss. "This is my contribution to the arsenal. With my usual genius, I didn't get anything except what I had on me. We may get into the textbooks with this one, gentlemen. Here we are, three trained men from one of the most technologically sophisticated cultures in the galaxy, and we've got a map, a glorified first-aid kit, and a pocket knife between us. That takes some doing."

Tony Morales grinned again. "You remember old Doc Knapp at the Institute, don't you? *'It's not what you've got in your hand that counts; it's what you've got in your head.'* How many times

did we hear him say that?"

"Too many times," Alston said. "It sounded good, but you can't eat your own brain."

"You and your stomach." Tony spread his hands expressively. "A couple of hours without food and already you're starving to death."

Alston had to smile. He wasn't a prodigious eater, but he always liked to know where his next meal was coming from. There was nothing like uncertainty in the food situation to make him *really* hungry.

"I hate to mention it," Roger Pennock said, "but it seems to me that our most immediate problem has a slightly different slant to it. The question isn't, What are we going to eat? The question is, Are we going to be eaten?"

Alston nodded. He put his shirt back on in a kind of reflex action, as though it might offer some protection. He looked around carefully. On the surface, there was nothing alarming: a sea of damp wind-rippled grass, a few scattered trees, the dark curve of the rain forest to the south. That peaceful-seeming savanna was an illusion, though. The equation was a simple one, quite possibly the oldest maxim in ecology. Where there was abundant grass, there were herds of animals that lived on the grass. Where there were herds of grass-eaters, there were carnivores that

preyed on the herds.

In short, they were in classic hunting country—and they weren't the hunters.

The big cats were out there; he was certain of that. He knew enough about those cats to respect them. They rather closely resembled the old terrestrial lions, although, of course, they were not identical. They weren't as lazy as the African lions had been, and they did not seem to be active at night. They had no natural enemies on Pollux Five: they were utterly fearless. Like the African lions, though, they hunted in packs. They usually made their kills in the late afternoon, just before darkness fell. And they were tough, tough and quick and strong.

There was one other thing. They liked to eat men. When the base had first been established a little over a year ago, it had been necessary to shoot out the cats in the area. An earthlike planet had its advantages: you can eat the animals. It also poses certain problems: the animals can eat you too.

The cats weren't much of a danger to a properly armed man. But a man without weapons was another matter entirely. A man has no troublesome horns. He has no claws, no teeth worthy of the name. He can't even run away, not for long.

Alston sat down in the grass

and pushed his hair back out of his eyes. "Anybody got any bright ideas?"

There was a long silence.

Alston took a stab at it, thinking out loud. "I figure we've got about two hours of daylight left. Even if they knew our exact position back at home plate, they wouldn't be able to pick us up before morning. And they *don't* know our exact position. We may not even be missed yet—those automatic signals have conked out before. We've got to stay clear of the cats, and this is the time they do their hunting. We'd be crazy to try to walk out of here, at least until we're sure that we won't be picked up. We're five hundred miles from the base—"

"More like five hundred and fifty miles," Tony broke in, studying his maps. "And that includes an awful lot of thick jungle and about two million fat rivers. Look here—you could go almost all the way back to home plate and never get out of the rain forest. It would take us forever. If we tried to stick to the open country, it would add a couple of hundred miles and we'd have the cats to deal with. And some of these rivers—well, we'd have to build some boats, that's all."

"I'm not about to try to walk five hundred and fifty miles through a jungle," Roger Pen-nock said flatly. "I'll stay here

and rot first."

Alston cocked his head, listening. Was that thunder he heard? It might have been, or . . .

He stood up. "Okay," he said, "We stay put, at least for now. That's only common sense anyway. The more we move, the less chance there will be of finding us. But do we stay *here*—out in the grass with the cats?"

"No thanks," Tony said. "I vote we head for that rain forest. We can be in it in half an hour. The cats wouldn't come in there, would they?"

Alston considered. "No, I don't think so. That stuff is pretty thick. A big cat likes open country—that's where his food is. We could climb trees, too. Those cats couldn't get to us if we got up high enough. That's one thing a man can do, by God—he can climb a tree better than a lion."

"We don't know the first thing about those forests," Roger objected. "The work on them has hardly begun, except from the air. There could be *anything* in that jungle."

"We know what's out here," Tony pointed out. "That's good enough for me."

Alston heard the sound again. It was closer now. A roaring, yes, like an echo from the thunder. But that was no thunder . . .

"I'm with Tony, he said. "Looks like you're outvoted, Rog."

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Roger heaved himself to his feet. "I'm too damned big for the trees. If I wanted to play Tarzan, I wouldn't have to go twenty-nine light-years to do it."

"It beats playing Daniel in the kitty-cage," Alston said.

The three men started off toward the south, moving toward the shadowed bulk of the rain forest. It was slow going. The ground was soggy under their feet, and the grass was slick and knife-edged.

The sun drifted lower in the western sky . . .

Behind them, the roaring resolved itself into a series of throaty, coughing animal snarls. It was a hunting pack, no doubt of that. The cats might be after them or they might be following another scent. In any event, they were getting close.

The three men broke into a stumbling run. The grass cut their arms, slashed at their faces. Alston slipped and fell, got up again, ran harder. His lungs labored in his chest. His mouth was dry.

So this is how it feels, he thought. This is how it feels to be a man as men once were, defenseless, afraid, running for the trees. . .

It wasn't a good feeling.

The dark forest loomed ahead of him. Fifteen minutes away, ten minutes—

He was grateful for one thing,

grateful even as he scrambled and ran with the terrible roaring behind him. Pollux Five was an earthlike planet. Earth's twin, they called her. Oh, there were a few differences here and there, but basically the world was familiar enough. No monsters, no lethal atmosphere, no gravity that crushed the human body, no problems about water . . .

They could survive if they reached the trees.

They could live, on a twin of Earth. . .

Earth's twin.

In a sense, all of man's far voyaging, all of the work and dreams and blood and tears he had poured into the conquest of interstellar space, had been aimed at this: a world where men might live under friendly skies, a world where there was still room to stretch. A man needs to stretch occasionally, both intellectually and emotionally. Otherwise he is dead, even if his body is still warm and his heart still pumps. A man is not an ant and he was not made to live in an anthill. There is no room for experiment in an anthill; there is no leeway for mistakes. Anthills are regimented; they merely reproduce themselves down through the millenia. And Earth had become something very like an anthill, a new and glittering kind of anthill, smothered under

the weight of its own swarming population.

Of course, Pollux Five was not the only earthlike planet, and it was by no means the first one that man had found. There were others, although they were not common. One of the consequences of the folding effect of overdrive was that it was sometimes easier to reach star systems that were remote in normal space than it was to journey to Sol's closer neighbors; Pollux had been visited fairly late in the brief history of deep-space exploration.

Nevertheless, Pollux Five had been an exciting find. It was a virtual twin of Earth and it seemed to be free of manlike life. That was rare indeed.

Finding an earthlike planet, though, was less than half the battle. Once it was located, someone had to decide what to do with all that real estate. That was when the fun started.

It took—literally—astronomical amounts of money to finance the exploration of space. It was no job for individual pioneers, no matter how wealthy they might be. No man could simply blast off into the unknown, pick himself a likely looking world, and stake out a claim.

Governments were involved.

Laws were involved.

Pressure groups, politics, corporations, ethics—all entered into it. Philosophers and businessmen,

dreamers and con men, bureaucrats and research men—everybody had a finger in the pie.

In theory, the thing was simple enough. When a useful planet was discovered, which happened perhaps once a year, it was reported to UNECA—the United Nations Extraterrestrial Control Administration. UNECA then sent out a survey team to determine exactly what the situation was. The composition of the survey team depended on whether or not the planet was inhabited. The findings of the survey team formed the basis for the planetary classification.

Planets that were radically different from Earth, as most of them were, did not usually pose much of a problem. Intelligent life-forms were practically nonexistent on such worlds, and any sort of colonization was prohibitively difficult. They could be assigned to commercial corporations, if any were interested, with the proviso that basic research rights had to be respected.

Earthlike planets were an altogether different story.

The U.N. had emerged from the Last Wars much stronger than it had been before, not because it was perfect but because there was no workable alternative. The U.N. was liberally supplied with countries that had once been colonies themselves. Many of them were by no means rich or powerful, but

they had votes. The governments of those nations were, to say the least, sensitive to anything that smelled remotely like colonialism. Even centuries after the decline of the colonial empires on Earth the old memories were very strong. It made little difference whether or not the anti-colonial sentiments made good sense. A government floats on slogans, breathes deeply in the smog of unstated premises, and feeds on non-rational behavior. The governments of U.N. members that had been colonies after 1900 fought against presumably neo-colonial ideas with all the fervor of a holy crusade—they had to, or they promptly became so many ex-governments.

The governments of the former colonial powers, naturally, vied with one another to demonstrate how emancipated and forward-thinking *they* had become.

So when an earthlike planet was found—then what?

If the planet was uninhabited at the time of contact, then it could be exploited for scientific, commercial, or settlement purposes. The term "uninhabited" was legally defined. It meant that the planet in question was not occupied by man or manlike beings. A man or a manlike being was defined as a life-form which (a) could create and manipulate symbols, (b) had a culture, (c) had a language, and (d) was

capable of rational thought in some situations, given its cultural assumptions. If the life-forms were manlike structurally—if they were more akin to the primates than to other forms of animal life—they automatically fell into Category One if they had the other requisites, and were therefore protected by Earth law. If they were not manlike structurally — a vestige of ethnocentrism, to be sure, since it made little real difference—then there were formal hearings before the World Court.

If the planet was inhabited, things got complicated. How much of the planet was inhabited? How different were the cultures in different areas of the planet? It could—and did—take teams of anthropologists decades just to determine what the situation was. Suppose the situation had been reversed and Earth had been the planet contacted, say around 1800. How could there be a single policy for Earth? What one guideline would have sufficed for the Arunta of Australia, the Baganda of Africa, the Plains Indians, and the King of England? In essence, however, the basic rule was simple enough. If the local culture, whether isolated or planet-wide, was not sufficiently far advanced to understand a treaty, then Earth adopted a hands-off policy for that particular culture. If the culture was hostile, the same policy ap-

plied. If treaties *were* possible—and the ships had come a long way to turn back without ramming one through—they had to be very carefully drawn. Native cultures could not be “exploited” or subjected to “drastic manipulation.” They could not be “coerced.” There had to be a “fair” return on commercial transactions. There had to be observers . . .

All this was theory, of course.

In practice, there were loopholes.

There were fine points of the law. Exactly what, for instance, constituted “drastic manipulation,” and what did understanding a treaty mean?

And other planets were a long, long way from Earth . . .

There were other problems.

Take an “earthlike” planet, for example. What precisely did that mean? Which Earth? the Earth of the Sahara? The Arctic? The Pacific Ocean? The Rocky Mountains?

Even a twin of Earth could be full of surprises.

And evolution can be the biggest joker of them all.

Start with similar cells in a similar environment and the results can be unpredictable. There can be radical differences, both large and small—both birds and mammals, after all, developed from something already as complex as a reptile. And the results can be *similar* but not the *same*.

A shark and a porpoise look a lot alike at first glance, but it is unwise to confuse the two.

Take a twin of Earth.

Take a world like Pollux Five.

Take a world that rotates on its axis in the same period as the Earth, a world that revolves around its sun in a terrestrial year.

Take a world that seems familiar.

Take a world with only a few differences, here and there . . .

Alston Lane plunged into the forest. The transition was abrupt: one moment he was running across the grassy plain, and the next the great trees had closed in around him. He forced himself to keep on going for perhaps a hundred yards before he stopped to catch his breath. Tony Morales was right behind him and Roger Pennock, huffing and puffing, lumbered up within a minute.

“Brother,” Alston panted, “am I completely out of shape!”

“When it comes to track meets,” Tony said, “they can include me out.”

Their voices were tiny things, lost in the immensity of the rain forest. Alston looked around him with a feeling that was close to awe. The place was more like a cathedral than anything else. It was not really a jungle; there was practically no undergrowth. The trees were straight and tall, some of them growing to a height that

must have been more than three hundred feet. There were few lower branches and the upper canopies of leaves screened off the light from the forest floor. It was dark and gloomy around the bases of the immense trees, and Alston doubted that it was much brighter in the middle of the day. The air was still and humid. Gnarled vines crawled up the tree trunks, seeking the light. There was a fine, steady rain of debris falling from the hidden world above: bugs and pollen and bits of leaves and bark. It made for a rich, dark soil that felt like a sponge. Alston saw brightly colored birds swooping down out of the shadows, and there was a continual chirping and chattering filtering down through the thick air that only served to accentuate the silence of the world below.

"Quite a place," Roger Pennock said, scooping up a handful of the moist soil and staring at it. "Must get a couple of hundred inches of rain a year, wouldn't you think?"

"Looks like it," Alston agreed. "But how about all that savanna country right next door? There must be a pretty sharp break in the rainfall pattern—"

Tony Morales put his hands on his hips and looked up. "Speaking of the savanna country right next door, what's to prevent those cats from coming in here? It looks pretty damned open to me."

I doubt that they spend much

time in here," Alston said. "There's no food for them."

"There is now," Roger reminded him. "Namely, us."

Tony grinned. "I think you were pointing out one advantage that a man has over a lion awhile back, Alston. He can climb trees, I think you said. Let's see you climb one of these babies."

Alston looked again at the great trees and felt something less than optimistic. The trees were big, too big to get his arms around, and there weren't any convenient low branches. All of the foliage was up high, fighting for the sunlight. Of course, not all of the trees were giants. There were some little fellows only forty feet high. They didn't have to get to the top of the forest; they just had to get off the ground.

"I think the vines are our best bet," he said slowly. "If we could follow them around the trunks we might be able to get up to the lower branches, find a place where we could rest."

"Too bad our floaters won't work in reverse," Tony said.

"They won't break a fall much from forty or fifty feet up, either," Alston pointed out. "We're on our own, to coin an original phrase."

Roger stared up at the trees. "I'd just as soon climb a mountain. We need an ape, not a man."

Alston shrugged. "We've still got a little ape in us, Rog. Let's

see if we can use it."

Roger looked extremely dubious. "I think we're asking for trouble."

"Look," Alston said impatiently. "It's getting dark, right? In another hour we won't have any light at all down here. Maybe those cats will let us alone, sure. But what if they don't? Do you want to try to run up one of those things in the dark?"

"I doubt that it will ever become a popular sport," Roger admitted.

"Come on, Chimp," Tony said to Alston. "Show us how it's done!"

Alston took a deep breath. He thought he could still hear the roaring of the big cats, but he wasn't certain. He didn't particularly care for the idea of waiting around to find out how close the cats would come or whether or not they would kill at night. It seemed to him that the trees were the lesser of two evils.

He sought out a tree trunk that was thick with vines. He groped for a hand-hold, pulled himself up, groped for a purchase for his feet. He worked his way along the vine, moving up in a spiral. He got about six feet off the ground before he fell.

He picked himself up, swearing.

"Great," Tony said. "Now let's see you swing hand over hand."

Alston ignored him. He bent down and took off his shoes. He hesitated a moment, then

stripped off his socks as well. The much advertised human foot, he reflected, was not worth much for climbing. It had evolved too far, into a platform designed for standing on solid ground. Still, it worked better than a shoe that wouldn't grip at all.

He started up again.

It was better this time. He did not fall. He could curl his toes enough to support his weight while his hands slid along the rough vine. But the climb was murderously difficult. He was soaked in sweat before he had gotten up fifteen feet. And he made an unwelcome discovery. There were antlike insects living in the bark of the tree. They bit him with maddening persistence as he climbed.

He did not look back. He just kept hauling himself up the vine. He had the image of the dark branches above him fixed in his mind. If he could reach the branches, he could wedge himself into a crotch in the tree. He could rest.

He didn't even think about trying to get back down again.

He didn't think about anything except gripping the vine that wound around the tree.

It took him half an hour. They were the longest thirty minutes of his life. His feet were bleeding. His hands were raw and scratched. His shirt was black from the bark of the tree. His skin swollen with

insect bites. He pulled himself onto the first branch that he reached. He forked his legs over it and pressed his back against the trunk of the tree. It was anything but comfortable and his balance was precarious. He didn't care. He could not move another inch.

His body trembled with exhaustion.

Dimly, he was aware that Tony and Roger had followed his trail. They crawled up from the depths, like fish surfacing from a strange sea, and found branches of their own.

All of them were too tired to speak.

It had grown quite dark. Alston felt as though he were suspended in some in-between world. The early stars above him were screened by the higher branches. Below him, the forest floor was lost in the gloom. As his eyes gradually adjusted, he could see great white blossoms around him. In fact, there was a fairly lush growth clinging to the trees. The plants used the trees as platforms that thrust them up toward the sunlight. Orchids, ferns, air plants, flowering vines—all of them fighting for space and light. They were probably epiphytes rather than parasites, Alston thought.

It was a new world, a world that was hardly visible from the ground, a world that was entered simply by climbing a few feet up

a tree. And there were other worlds above him. His training taught him that, even though they were worlds he had never experienced. There must be zones of life in the trees, changing with the altitude and the amount of available light, zones of life that continued to the very top of the forest.

The notion occurred to him that when men explored a planet they left quite a lot of it out. They mapped the surface, that tiny fraction of a world where a man lived his life. Below the surface and above the surface—well, there was a sizeable amount of territory that the most determined explorer never even saw.

How many trees did Livingstone climb?

Alston felt his strength returning slowly. His breathing steadied and the sweat on his exposed skin began to dry. It was a little cooler at this height and he seemed to be above the ants. There were still insects in the air—gnats and flies and bees—but they were not too troublesome. He stirred slightly on his perch and tried to think.

"We look like one of those old pictures," he said, breaking the silence. "Remember them? *'How many faces can you find in this picture?'*"

"Laugh in the face of death," Tony Morales muttered. "Standard operating procedure for he-

roes."

Roger Pennock didn't say anything. The effort of the climb added to the after-effects of the rap on the head hadn't done the biologist any good.

Alston managed to talk Roger into swallowing a couple of the food capsules from the emergency pack. That was all he could do. There was no way he could get any of the capsules for himself or for Tony without risking losing them. He figured they could wait until morning; Roger was the one who needed them most.

He tried to settle himself more comfortably against the tree. He rapidly found out that there just wasn't any satisfactory position. Tired as he was, it was impossible for him to sleep. Whenever he dozed off, he would slump to one side and lose his balance. He had some dandy semi-conscious falling dreams but he got precious little rest.

The night was very long and very dark. It rained once, briefly, and he could hear the heavy drops pattering on the leaves above him. The forest was not completely silent even when the rain was not falling. There were sounds of movement in the overhead branches: sudden scurrying noises, as though something fairly large was moving through the trees. Twice, he thought he heard voices or calls from the roof of the forest.

He could not see anything. Pol-lux Five had no moon and the starlight was too faint to penetrate the canopy of leaves.

Nevertheless, he had the distinct impression that he could be seen.

He was certain that something was watching him.

He told himself that it was just his imagination acting up. He failed to convince himself.

There was something up there.

It was a long, miserable night. Alston hoped fervently that it was the last one he would ever spend in a tree.

The morning finally came: first a dead grayness that seeped down out of the sky, then the warm and living light.

The three men, weary and cramped, did not even discuss the matter. They started down as soon as they could see. Surprisingly, it was easier to get down than it had been to climb up—not always the case, as Alston remembered from climbing trees as a kid. The vines gave them a good hold, and they did not have to lift their weight.

They walked out of the forest and back into the grasslands. The reddish sunlight hit them with a welcome glare. They found a small stream close to the trees. They washed up as well as they could and drank some of the water with the food capsules.

Alston figured that the capsules would last them for two more days if they took them sparingly. After that—

Well, they would have to find something else.

Alston had expected that he would feel better about things in the morning light. It didn't work out that way. He was dead tired. The blue sky was very big and very empty. There was no sign of a search plane from home plate. He didn't need to look at Tony's map to know that he was a long way from nowhere.

There was fresh dung in the grass by the stream. Most of it was from grazing animals, but some of it had obviously come from carnivores.

It wasn't much of a trick to find the spot where the cats had made their kill. There was a veritable black cloud of carrion birds less than two hundred yards away from them. They walked cautiously over and took a look. What had been a large horned animal was almost buried under the weight of the birds. The birds were tearing at the scraps of hide and bloody meat with a maniacal intensity. The flies were thick and Alston saw a couple of hyena-like creatures sitting on their haunches with their tongues hanging out, waiting for their turn.

"Breakfast, anyone?" he asked. There were no takers.



The three men retreated to the stream. They got the flares ready, just in case. The great sky was totally empty. The forest looked dark and uninviting.

They took turns napping in the warm sun, with one man always awake to watch the sky. Nothing happened. Alston was reasonably sure that the cats would sleep through the heat of the day, but he was still jumpy. If the cats caught them out in the open . . .

His sleep, such as it was, was tense and troubled.

When the afternoon came, the wind began to stir through the long grass. Shadows crept across the savanna. Dark clouds massed on the horizon.

They were faced with the same decision they had confronted the day before.

The search plane had not found them. The cats were active again, and they had no defense. They did not relish another night in the trees, but there was no other choice.

They filled up with water and started back toward the forest.

This time, they barely made it.

The coughing roars of the hunting pack were loud in their ears. They could hear the heavy sounds of the animals as they padded through the thick grass. The three men plunged into the forest and scrambled up the tree without stopping for argument.

The big cats followed them right into the forest.

Alston clung to his branch, his heart hammering. He could see the cats below him on the forest floor. There were six of them, all females. Tawny they were, with a hot and dusty smell that rose in the still forest air. They reared on their powerful hind legs, clawing at the tree. Their roars were deafening. He could see their white teeth clearly and their claws made clean, straight furrows in the bark of the tree.

Alston shuddered. It didn't take much imagination to calculate their chances against those cats. Their chances added up to a grand total of zero.

We were fools to go back down there, he thought. *We've got to try something else.*

Something else, yes. But what?

He couldn't think with those cats hurling themselves against the tree.

He closed his eyes and just held on.

After a time, the cats left. There was a sudden silence in the forest. Then, gradually, the birds began to call. There was movement in the higher branches . . .

Alston looked up. There were still a couple of hours of daylight left. He studied the trees. The branches were more accessible above him. They grew closer together and most of them were

solid boughs that would easily support his weight.

If he could get up high enough—

He wormed his way around to where Roger was located. It was not as difficult for him to move now. He felt a small pleasure in the fact that he was learning how to handle himself in the tree. "Rog, give me one of the flares, will you?"

Roger—pasty-faced now, with a sheen of unhealthy sweat on his forehead—looked a question at him.

"I'm going to try to climb higher. If I can get up there another seventy or eighty feet, I should be able to get a clear view of the sky. I can watch for the search plane without ever going back to the ground. I can shoot off the flare from up there too. We can wait until the plane lands out there in the open country and *then* come down to wrestle with those cats."

Roger shook his head. "You'll never make it. You'll just get stuck up there—no food and no water. Or you'll fall and break your neck."

"Encouragement, that's what I like." Alston took a deep breath. "Look, those cats will tear us to pieces if we keep on playing footsy with them. I'll bet there *is* water up there and probably food of some kind too. There's *something* besides birds up

there—I've heard them moving around. They've got to eat and they've got to drink, whatever they are. I think it's worth a try."

"I'm with Alston," Tony said. "I've had enough lion-taming for awhile. I'm for climbing."

Alston considered. "I think you'd better stick with Rog for now, if you don't mind. If it works out, we can link up in the morning. If I don't make it, the two of you are no worse off than you were before. Okay?"

"I guess it makes sense," Tony agreed. "Just remember that if you fall on me, I'll never forgive you."

Roger didn't say anything.

Alston reflected that a resource cartographer and a biologist were not ideal companions for a life in the trees. Still, he had to admit that they probably wouldn't have picked an ecologist for an ally either.

He took the flare and stuck it in his belt.

He started up.

Alston kept close to the great vine at first, following it around the tree to reach the next branch. He pulled himself up on the branch, rested a minute, and went on.

The climbing got easier. The trunk of the tree grew slimmer, so that he could get a better grip on it. The air was somewhat cooler

and the humidity was markedly less. The branches began to grow in profusion but it was hard to make use of them. They all angled sharply upwards, thrusting toward the light. He tried to edge his way along a branch but had to return to the main trunk when the branch thinned out. It was only at the very top of the forest that the branches spread in such a way that it might be possible to move directly from one branch to another.

The vines divided as he went higher. They hung from the roof of the forest like a tangled curtain of flowered vegetation. He saw nests in the vines and wondered why the birds built them there. Protection against snakes?

He saw no snakes but he was amazed at the life that swarmed around him. Spiders were everywhere, their strong webs catching the slanting rays of the setting sun. Birds hummed through the air like flashes of sentient color, and woodpeckers drummed on the trees. He climbed by a hole in the tree trunk just as the bushy brown tail of a squirrel disappeared into its depths.

When he paused to rest, he studied an air plant growing near him. The bromeliad was fastened to a branch, but it was not getting its nourishment from the tree. The thing had long, narrow leaves that sprouted from a common center. The bases of the leaves

formed a watertight cone. He crawled out to it. There *was* water in there, collected from the rain—a couple of quarts of water. He examined it carefully. The water had bits of dead leaves in it and a chunk of something that looked like rotten fruit. He could see some tiny worms and even something that looked like a tadpole. He smiled. He *thought* he had heard frogs in these trees. The water didn't look very appetizing, but it shouldn't be much of a trick to rig a container of leaves that would catch rain from the next downpour. Fruits, eggs, water—a man could live a long time here if he had to.

He eased his way back to the main trunk and looked up. He still had a long way to go. Perhaps forty feet, he estimated. If he could get that high, he should have a relatively unobstructed view of the sky. But the vegetation above him was very dense, and the branches might not support him. If he fell now—

Well, he'd have time to think it over before he hit bottom.

He had another hour of light at best.

He started up again.

Within minutes he was wishing that he had waited until morning. He was more tired than he had figured, and the light was getting tricky. His arms felt heavy, and there was a numbness in his feet that made it difficult

for him to get any kind of a grip. A slight breeze stirred through the upper branches, and the leaves seemed to be whispering to him.

Quite suddenly, the rains came.

There was no thunder—just a sheet of water that poured down out of the sky. The canopy above him held the water briefly, and then the fat and heavy drops began to spill over. The rain itself did not bother him, but it made the bark slippery. His hands groped for holds that were no longer there.

Alston stopped.

He tried to go back down.

It was hard to see and his feet slipped on the vine. He froze against the tree, unable to go up or down. His stomach turned over. He knew that he wasn't going to make it.

He just held on. There was nothing else he could do. He held on until his whole body trembled. The rain stopped, but the bark was still slick.

He had to give it a try before his strength left him entirely. It was dark now. He knew he didn't have a chance, but he couldn't stay where he was.

He released his hold and tried to slide down the wet vine.

For just a moment he thought he might make it to the branch below. Then his numb feet failed him, and his hands were too weak to support his weight.

With a sickening sensation he

began to fall away from the vine. He sensed the drop below him. His mouth opened for a final involuntary scream.

The scream never came.

At the last split second he felt strong, small hands clutching at his arms. Incredibly, he was suspended in mid-air.

He struggled wildly for a moment, and then reason took over. If he pulled free, he was finished. He forced himself to keep still.

The hands bit into his flesh, holding him. Gradually, he felt himself being pulled back into the tree.

There was solid wood under his bare feet.

He stared at the things that surrounded him in the tree. Dark figures half the size of a man. Hairy. Long prehensile tails that gripped like extra hands. Arms that were long and thin but very strong. A sharp, pungent smell. Great yellow impossible, eyes.

Alston felt his senses reeling.

One of the things stuck his face close to Alston's. There was absolutely no expression on the face. The nose was black and wet.

"*Tekki-luka?*" the thing said. It sound like a question.

Alston passed out. He felt as though he were falling interminably, down and down through velvet darkness toward the forest floor...

At first, when he came out of

it, he didn't know where he was.

He was on his side with his knees doubled up almost to his chin. There was a softness around him, an acrid smell that was new and yet familiar. He could see a silver dust of stars above him, a lacy patchwork of dark leaves. He seemed to be swaying slightly.

He had been falling and then—
It all came back to him.

His body jerked convulsively. His hands reached out for support, seeking solid wood. He touched only softness, vegetation of some sort. He felt the return of panic, fought it down. He got up on his knees. He tried to see, his eyes wide in the starlight.

He was in a nest of some kind.

He fumbled around with his hands. The nest was built of small branches that had been bent down and interlaced. The nest was concave and lined with leaves. It was too small for him, but it was not uncomfortable. It seemed firm enough to support his weight.

He lifted his head.

He was not alone.

The things were all around him in the trees. There must have been fifty of them, small dark figures with glowing yellow eyes. They sat on branches, some with their tails hanging down and others with tails curled around the wood. They seemed quite still and solemn, watching him.

Alston stared at them, feeling

as though he were caught in some sort of a crazy nightmare. It was hard for him to see in the uncertain light, but he could see enough to make a stab at identification. The things weren't monkeys, and they certainly weren't apes—not with those tails. Still, they looked like primates of some sort. It wasn't easy to define a primate, but a man generally knew one when he saw one. It was a little like being able to spot a fellow countryman in a foreign land—there was a certain kinship that you could sense.

The animals had never been reported before on Pollux Five.

How many trees did Livingstone climb?

Alston waited. He could do nothing else. The one real fact that he had was that those things had saved his life. They had hauled him to a nest in the trees, and they had not harmed him. If they had wanted him for food, he would have been manburger by now.

He couldn't call the shots. The next move was up to them.

For what seemed to be a very long time, there *was* no next move. The animals looked at him and he looked at them. The nest swayed a little in the breeze. There was a great darkness below him, a darkness that was alive with invisible stirrings and rustlings. Above him there was the black canopy of the leaves sharp-

ly framed against the blaze of the stars.

Quite suddenly, almost as though there had been a signal, the silence was broken. The animals began to chatter with some degree of animation. Their voices were high and melodic but occasionally dropped into deeper coughing sounds. Alston could not tell whether they were talking to him or about him, but he had the uneasy suspicion that they *were* talking. Of course, the mere fact of vocal communication did not necessarily imply a true language—but just the same . . .

As suddenly as it had began, the chattering stopped.

Alston waited again, peering at the creatures for some sort of a clue about what was going to happen. There were no clues. The animals just continued to sit on their branches. They seemed to be doing nothing at all, and yet Alston sensed that something was going on, some kind of information was being exchanged that he could not fathom. It was disconcerting.

A small brown head popped out of the leaves above the nest. Yellow eyes looked down at him. The animal—a young one, evidently, judging by its size—made a tentative movement toward him. At once, a larger animal left its perch, scurried along the branch, and snatched the inquisitive one away. A mother protect-

ing her child?

For what seemed to be a very long time, there was no further movement. Alston felt himself growing drowsy despite his excitement. He had not had any real sleep for many hours. He yawned and shifted his position in the nest.

There was no preliminary warning, no signal of any sort that he could catch. An adult—a powerful animal, and definitely male—detached himself from the others and moved slowly toward Alston.

He came right up to the edge of the nest. Alston pulled himself up, careful to make no abrupt movements. *What in the devil do I do now?* Alston managed a welcoming smile.

There was no response from the male. His face did not change expression at all. The great yellow eyes—perfectly round, like marbles—were luminous. The large, slightly pointed ears were erect. The black nose was damp, like that of a dog. Alston realized that the animal had a kind of a snout. The lips were very thin. Probably, Alston decided, the creature was incapable of producing manlike facial expressions. A smile would mean less than nothing to him. It might even be interpreted as a threat.

"*Tekki-luka?*" the animal said. Its voice was pleasant enough, more like a woman's than a man's.

Alston hesitated. Obviously, he

was supposed to say something. But what? He kept his voice as soft as he could, figuring that his normal tones would sound harsh. "My name is Alston Lane," he said, feeling like ten kinds of a fool. "Thank you for helping me. I would like to be your friend."

The animal stared at him. It was impossible to read anything from his expression, but he seemed to be waiting for something else. "*Tekki-luka?*" he said again.

Alston started to sweat. He tried to think of something, but no brilliant ideas came. He pointed to himself. "Alston Lane," he said.

There was no response to this, but he got the impression that the animal before him had relaxed somewhat.

The male extended his hand. There was something in it, a fruit of some sort.

Alston reached out gingerly and took the fruit. He noticed that the hand was at least superficially like his own. It had five fingers with one of them set off at an angle. But some of the fingers had narrow nails and some had claws . . .

"Thank you," he said. He examined the fruit. He had seen one like it before, back at home plate. It was like a small orange. He peeled it carefully and took a bite out of it. It was bitter, but it had a lot of moisture in it.

He ate the whole thing. He was reasonably sure the fruit was not

poisonous, and he did not want to offend the animal by rejecting his gift. In any event, he was hungry.

He knew that he should offer something in return. But what did he have? He was not about to surrender his knife, and he needed his flare. He searched through his pockets. Handkerchief? A pretty sorry gift. Money? It would be meaningless, of course. He had nothing else, except —

He took out his pocket comb. He showed it to the animal. He demonstrated its use, running it through his hair several times. He held it out.

The animal took it. He stared at it with his great yellow eyes, turning it over and over in his hands. He reached up with the comb and pulled it through the hair on the back of his neck. He examined it again, found a bug in it, and popped the bug into his mouth.

The animal said nothing more. He seemed to be waiting for something. The other animals on the branches were likewise silent and expectant.

Alston did not know what to do. The animal had given him something, and he had made a return gift. He had anticipated some sign of approval, some lessening of tension. But there was no reaction at all that he could see.

If only those faces had some expression, if only he could get a clue —

As abruptly as he had come, the

male pulled back and rejoined the others on the branches. He took his comb with him.

Alston felt that he had failed in some obscure way. It was damnable frustrating. The animals had saved his life, and pure altruism was probably as rare on Pollux Five as it was anywhere else. They had made overtures, and he had responded as well as he could. He had made no obvious mistakes. And yet, somehow, he had flunked a test. What did they want?

The animals continued to sit on the branches, looking at him. They were so many silent shadows in the trees. They were neither friendly nor threatening. They were just there.

Alston settled himself more comfortably in the nest. He was worn out, physically and emotionally. It was hard to think.

He would just have to wait for daylight. He was where he wanted to be, after all. He could search the sky for a plane, fire off a flare if he saw one.

He really had no choice.

He closed his eyes. He could feel the slight swaying of the tree, hear the faint rustle of the leaves . . .

Unbidden, the old lullaby crept into his mind:

"Rock-a-bye baby, in the tree top.

"When the wind blows the cradle will rock.

"When the bough breaks the cradle will fall—"

Incredibly, he slept.

Alston woke up with the first light of the sun.

He sat up and looked around. He had a sudden attack of vertigo and had to close his eyes. It was definitely a long way down. He could not see the forest floor, but he could see more than enough.

He waited a moment and opened his eyes again. The animals had vanished as though they had been creatures out of a dream. The limbs of the trees were utterly deserted. He heard a woodpecker drumming away below him, saw a squirrel poke his head out of a hole. That was all.

He looked more closely. He surveyed the trees one by one. He saw some nests that were like his own. He thought he could see something in the nests, but he could not be sure. Had the animals all sacked out? Had they gone away somewhere?

He looked up. He did not have a completely unobstructed view of the sky, but he could see patches of blue. He could certainly hear a plane if one came close, and the foliage was open enough so that he could launch a flare.

Unhappily, there was no plane.

He was hungry and his mouth was dry. His dizziness, he realized, had not been caused entirely by

his glance downstairs. He was a long way from starvation but he did need food.

He stood up in the nest, bracing himself against the tree. If he could find some of those fruits—

His mouth dropped open in surprise.

His breakfast was waiting for him. It had been neatly placed on a small limb just above his nest. There were two of the orange-like fruits and three things that looked vaguely like green bananas. There were four pink-shelled eggs. There was a dead frog and a tidy pile of squashed bugs. There was even a container of water. He picked the container up and looked at it. It was made out of a single large leaf that had been cupped in a square frame of twigs. The twigs had been tied together with threads of fiber. The knots were good and tight.

Alston swallowed some of the water. It had a flat, sweet taste to it. He ate the fruits. The banana things were tough and burned his throat but he got them down. He lost one egg before he figured out how to crack the shells against his teeth so that the yolk wouldn't get away from him. He decided against the dead frog and the bugs. He wasn't *that* hungry yet.

He felt better. Some of the cobwebs left his brain.

He stared across at the nests. The animals were probably in them unless they had gone away.

In either case, he was certain that they would return. He viewed the prospect with mixed emotions. They had saved his neck, yes. They had not harmed him. They had fed him. They might be his only hope if the plane did not come. And yet, there was something about them, something strange . . .

"Alston! Hey, Alston!"

The hail from below startled him so that he almost fell. The voice was faint and seemed to come up from his right. The nest must be in a different tree—

"Hey!" he yelled. His voice sounded explosively loud. He looked nervously at the nests but nothing stirred. "Are you okay?"

"Fine!" Tony's voice, he thought. "What in the hell are you doing?"

Alston smiled a little. How could he possibly tell them, hollering like this? He was too far away for effective communication. He shouted down that he could see the sky and was watching for the plane. He told them not to go out in the open again.

"Just hang on!" he hollered. "Be down later!"

Alston's throat hurt. He hadn't yelled like that since he was a kid. He looked again at the sky. It was as empty as though it had been freshly created.

He checked the nests. There was no sign of movement.

There was absolutely nothing that he could do. He had to stay up high to watch for the rescue plane. It was clear that the searchers did not know exactly where they were, or they would have come by now. If they were hunting at random, he might get only one chance to signal them. He couldn't afford to gamble.

He was afraid to climb higher. There was no point in lateral movement, even if he could manage it. He wasn't even sure that he could climb down the tree again without help.

He settled back into his nest and waited. It was an interminable day. There was a rainstorm that lasted about half an hour, but apart from that he was quite comfortable. He watched the brightly colored birds darting among the lower branches, but as entertainers they left something to be desired.

He was bored and he knew the feeling well. Alston had been in tight spots before. Adventures were thrilling only when they happened to other people. When you were smack in the middle of one, it was different. You were scared. You made mistakes. You got tired. You caught unromantic colds. You either had too much to do or nothing at all. What you wanted was *out*.

It was late afternoon before he saw the animals again. As he had suspected, they were in the nests.



They woke up slowly, stretching and yawning like little old men. They completely ignored Alston. Some of the females began to nurse their children. Most of the others moved off to feed. They did not brachiate, he noticed. They walked easily along the limbs, four-handed rather than four-footed, hooking with their tails for additional support.

Alston stood up in the nest. Nothing happened. He waved his hands. Still nothing.

He started to climb out of the nest.

Instantly, there was a great flurry of activity. The animals converged on him with a quickness that was disconcerting. In a matter of seconds he was completely ringed.

Alston began to sweat. The daylight was no help at all. There was simply no way to tell what the animals were thinking. The faces seemed alert but nothing more. The expressions—if that was the term for them—were unreadable. The animals made no gestures of any sort. They just sat there, strange little creatures, not a one of them over four feet tall. Their great yellow eyes were unblinking. They stank, and that was about all they did.

Alston took a deep breath. He had to try something.

"Look," he said, keeping his voice soft. He broke off a small twig and placed it on a branch

above him. He pointed to the twig and then to himself. "This is me," he said. He grabbed some leaves and put them on the same branch. He pointed to the leaves and then at the animals. "This is you." he broke off two twigs and placed them below the branch on the edge of the nest. He pointed to the twigs and then down toward Tony and Rog, invisible in the depths of the forest. "These are my friends." He took the twig representing himself and the leaves. He lifted them slowly down to the two twigs on the nest, picked up the two twigs, and carried the whole pile back to the upper branch. "Do you understand?"

The animals did not nod. They did not shake their heads. They said nothing. And yet, a current seemed to pass among them. They stirred, some decision was taken—

Eight of the males detached themselves from the rest. They moved in close. One of them—it could have been the old boy who had taken the comb, although he didn't have it now—reached out and gripped his shoulder. "Tekki-luka?" he said.

Alston sighed. "That's it," he said. "Tekki-luka."

The males started down, with two of them waiting for Alston.

Whatever they were, the animals were far from stupid.

Alston left the nest and started

his descent.

He thought: *How in the name of heaven am I going to explain this to Rog and Tony?*

The mechanical problems of hoisting the men to the upper levels of the rain forest were trivial compared to the task of convincing Roger Pennock and Anthony Morales that this was a wise course of action. In the end, however, they accepted Alston's assurances and entrusted themselves to the animals. They were not happy about it but—as Alston pointed out—they were caught between a rock and a hard place. They were unwilling to venture for long into the open grasslands where the big cats waited. They could not possibly make it back to home plate by wandering through the endless forests—there was a lot of thick jungle country they would have to hack their way through, and it would take them forever. They could not continue to exist for long by hanging on for dear life to the lower branches of the trees. They could only go up, and if the plane did not come—

The plane did *not* come.

The long weeks dragged by with agonizing slowness, and the skies of Pollux Five remained emphatically empty. The plane did not come, and it became glaringly obvious that it was not going to

come. The searchers had missed them somehow, and that was that.

The three men had one chance to get home.

They could get home if the animals that surrounded them in the trees would take them there.

The animals were not hostile. They were not friendly either—the concept seemed to be meaningless to them—but they were willing to help for whatever reasons of their own. They were intelligent, sometimes alarmingly so. It was possible to communicate with them to some degree.

The three men had food to eat, water to drink. They were perfectly safe as long as they stayed in their nests. They had no superhuman monsters to fight. The planet was a virtual twin of Earth.

Problem: How do you learn to fly if you don't happen to be a bird?

Problem: If men of good will often have trouble in understanding one another, how do you go about understanding a creature that is only human-by-definition—when that definition happens to leave out a key point or two?

Tony Morales scrambled back to his nest and squinted into the early morning sun. He was bearded and red-eyed, and his clothes were in rags. He threw his soiled map into the nest with disgust.

"How did it go?" Alston asked.

The nests of the three men were within a few feet of each other. The creatures had insisted on constructing separate nests, one for each man. It was easier to build the smaller nests, of course, but that did not seem to be the whole story. The animals always slept in individual nests, and they never entered any nest except their own. The pattern was a rigid one, and the only variation involved infants who slept with their mothers. Taboo, custom, law—whatever it was, it was important.

Tony sighed. He looked close to exhaustion. "It didn't go at all. I had maybe an hour of daylight before they all passed out. Naturally, they were all so tired by then that they couldn't concentrate. Did you ever try to explain a map to someone who never saw a map before—and do it in the dark? It's hopeless."

"A complete bust?" Alston tried to keep the despair out of his voice.

Tony yawned. "Oh, they know the general direction we want to go. They're smart, you know that. They even know where home plate is—I still can't figure out whether they've been there themselves or have just heard about it from the grapevine. But I can't work out an exact route with them. They know the way—there's a regular network of trails through these damned trees—but we can't follow them on *their*

trails. We're like a bunch of seven-footers trying to follow a pygmy through the bush. We can't move in the trees. If we go down, we have to avoid dense jungle country, and we have to stay clear of the grasslands. We're no good at night, and *they* can't operate in the daytime. I'm telling you, we may spend the rest of our lives sitting in these stupid nests."

"Try to grab some sleep, Tony. You've had a rough night. Rog and I will keep watch."

"Watch for what? Haven't you heard that the brothers Wright were nothing but a myth?" Tony curled up in his nest, clutching his maps. He was asleep in seconds, but it was a restless sleep; his body was as taught as a string on a bow.

Alston was tired himself; they all were. It would have been tough enough to adapt to daylight sleeping under the best of circumstances, and here the problem was compounded. They had to maintain a lookout during the day in case a plane should appear, and they had to work with the animals at night or not at all. Something within them could not adjust to the swaying of the trees, the sounds of birds and frogs and rustling leaves, the reversal of the sleeping cycle. Roger—back in the days when he had still been thinking clearly—had said something about bio-rhythms. Any life-form tended to

become set in its ways, intricately adjusted over the millenia to the subtle pulses of its normal environment—the shift of the seasons, the variations in pressures, the alternations between day and night. He had mentioned an old experiment with fiddler crabs. You could take the crabs from their beaches and put them in tanks in a lab. When the tide came in on their original beach, the crabs would rise in the tanks, still responding to the ancient rhythm. Man was not a fiddler crab, and he was an adaptable animal. But he had a body, a body he hardly understood, a body that responded to biochemical reactions that were set before his birth.

None of them slept well, and all of them had dreams of falling.

Tired or not, Alston knew that he had to try to talk to Rog. The biologist was in bad shape. He was pale and haggard, and his skin seemed to hang loosely on his bones, as though it had been designed for a different skeleton. Roger was so withdrawn that it was an effort to keep him going.

"Rog, I need your help."

The biologist stared vacantly at the trunk of the tree.

"When we get out of this mess, there's going to be a really colossal flap at UNECA. We're going to need your report as a biologist.

You've got to think about that, Rog."

Roger shook his head. "I'm afraid," he said softly. "Can't you understand that? We'll never get out of here. I'm afraid to go down. I'm afraid of *them*. I'm sick; I can't think. I don't know what to do."

Alston ignored the man's pessimism. He understood it all too well, but it did no good to keep talking about it. "Are you absolutely sure they don't have a name for themselves? I can't figure that one out."

Roger made no reply.

"Funny thing. They have names for other animals, don't they?"

The biologist stirred. He surely knew that Alston had the same answers he had, but the training of a lifetime pulled him into the discussion. "There is that one word," he said. His voice was so weak that Alston had to strain to hear it. "You know—*kerog*."

"It isn't a name, is it?"

"Well, no. Not really. I don't think so. It's more like a plural pronoun. It means *we* or *us* or something like that. They have names for other things—those big cats are *letoo*, for instance—but they don't think of themselves quite that way. They just *are*. They don't even have personal names—they recognize each other by smells, I think—but they do have a kinship system of some

sort. They don't seem to use language in the same way that we do; I mean, they don't use it in the same situations. They don't do *anything* the way we do. Hell, what difference does it make?

"It makes a lot of difference. We've *got* to understand them. We'll never get out of here unless we do. If you ever want to get home—"

"Home." Roger's voice was a whisper now. His eyes were bright and feverish. "If I want to get home..."

The biologist moved and moved fast. He had been inactive for so long that he caught Alston off guard. Roger scrambled out of his nest and started along a branch. He was bent almost double, gripping the wood with his hands and feet, moving like the tree creatures he had watched. Small whimpering noises came from his throat.

"Roger! Roger, come back!"

Alston looked on in horror, too stunned to move. Roger was following one of the tree trails, going where he had seen the animals go. The branch bent under his weight. He reached up, caught a limb, tried to pull himself to the next branch—it looked so easy when the animals did it—
He fell.

His mouth opened to scream but no scream came. He hit too quickly, his fall broken by a limb less than ten feet below him. He lay

quite still, his body draped over the branch. He had been fantastically lucky, but he could never make it back to the nest under his own power. If, indeed, he tried to come back...

Alston didn't wait to consider a plan of action. He left his nest and climbed down to the lower branch, clinging desperately to the vine. He crawled out along the limb toward Roger. The limb was a stout one, but it bent under the combined weight of the two men. He seized Roger's belt and hung on. He didn't look down.

Roger was only half conscious. He whispered and muttered incoherently to himself. He made no effort to help.

Alston tugged him back to the trunk of the tree. He pulled him up into a sitting position. He slapped the biologist in the face, hard. "Stand up, Roger. Put your hands on the vine."

"Can't. Tired, sick—"

"*Stand up!*"

Somehow, Alston got him back to his nest. He got under him and practically lifted him up on his shoulders. He dumped him into the nest and went back to his own. He sank into it, trembling.

"You bloody fool! You'll get us all killed!" He regretted it as soon as he said it. The man didn't know what he was doing.

Afraid. I'm afraid. Can't you understand that?" Roger began to whimper like a hurt child.

Alston forced himself to make soothing noises. He finally calmed Roger down, and the biologist drifted off to sleep.

Alston sat tensely in his nest, trying not to give way to despair. The sun moved slowly through the arc of the sky. The afternoon rains washed the air. Long shadows marched through the forest, and he could hear the distant roaring of the big cats.

Afraid? Alston smiled a little. He was not immune to fear. He was, he admitted to himself, scared to death. He was afraid of the long night, afraid of the trees and the wind, afraid of the great cats that prowled the grasslands. And most of all he was afraid of *them*.

The unknown was bad enough. The unknowable was worse.

Oh, yes, the man-things were human. They satisfied all the criteria. The boys at UNECA would welcome them into the family with open arms. The man-things could handle symbols, there was no doubt of that. They had a language. They had a culture. They were capable of rational thought. They were even primates, unless Alston himself was a cow. They could construct artifacts, they had customs and kinship systems, they were bright.

There were just two little things that made them different. Two little things that the legal defini-

tion of a man had not anticipated.

The creatures were arboreal. They lived in the trees.

The creatures were nocturnal. They were only active at night.

Two little things. And they meant—what?

Darkness was coming, the alien night. The man-things began to stir. They emerged from their nests. They looked at Alston with great yellow eyes and expressionless faces.

Alston called out, waking Tony.

He could not face them again alone.

The long weeks merged into endless months.

The three men did what they had to do. They stayed alive and they tried to find out enough about the man-things so that the creatures could help them get back to home plate more than five hundred miles away. It was hard work, tedious work, work that strained nerves and tested patience to the utmost. It was difficult enough for a trained anthropologist to understand the lifeway of a primitive tribe on Earth, even on a superficial basis, and there at least they had been dealing with men like themselves. These creatures were fundamentally different, and that made it tougher. It could not be done in a day or two. There were no convenient short cuts.

Roger Pennock recovered to

some extent and did what he could to help. He was quite rational some of the time, but he was a problem. He had spells of depression when his behavior was totally unpredictable. Tony Morales held up well. He stuck to his maps with a dogged determination that surprised Alston. Tony had always been an up-and-down sort of a guy, but he obviously had the stuff when he needed it. Alston worked harder than he had ever worked in his life, trying to be simultaneously an ecologist, an anthropologist, a father confessor, and a good-humor man.

None of them were well. The fruit-heavy diet was rough on the digestive system, and the lack of sleep did not help. They survived, but their reserves of strength were low.

They made ropes, twisting them from the fibers of sisal-like plants that grew on the forest floor. The man-things gathered them at night and carried them into the trees. The animals knew more about rope-making than the men did, and they seemed eager to share their knowledge.

They worked hard on the language.

They tried to learn, to understand.

The man-things had an astounding grasp of their own past, considering that they had no written records. It was characteristic of them that they thought

of life as a continuum, stretching back into remote antiquity and forward into a future that was very real to them. Indeed, the nearest thing they had to a religion was a kind of mystic conception of their species as a unity that extended from the beginning of time onward into infinity. They did not live only in the present. They could communicate some things about themselves, and other things could be guessed—

The emergence of the primates on Pollux Five had definite parallels with what had happened on Earth. There had been a time, millions of years ago, when the great reptiles had walked the land. Those ambulatory stomachs with gaping jaws had dominated the planet. The first mammals had been small ratlike creatures, arboreal for protection, nocturnal out of necessity. They had been ready and waiting when the giant lizards had been destroyed by the rise of mountain chains and the resultant ecological shifts.

Some of the mammals came down out of the trees. There had been a very rapid mammalian evolution, and the cat family had become dominant. At one time, there had been many different kinds of cats, including some tree-climbing types like leopards. The leopards had not survived—Alston suspected that the man-things had been responsible for that, although they refused to

discuss the subject—but the big cats had flourished. They were formidable animals, more diurnal than the terrestrial lions, great killing machines that weighed six hundred pounds or more. They were too big for the trees, but in the grasslands they were invincible.

The primates evolved out of the first ratlike mammals, the insectivores. Some of them left the trees and became essentially ground-dwelling animals like the baboons. They were not successful, destroyed by the cats before they reached a stage where they could develop an effective technology. Others stayed in the trees. In time, they became the man-things.

In terms of the primates known on Earth, they were more like the prosimians than the apes or monkeys. In some ways, they rather closely resembled the terrestrial lemurs and tarsiers. They stuck to the trees, and they never abandoned their nocturnal way of life. Unlike the prosimians, however, they were progressive with respect to size and intelligence. It was as though they added the best features of apes and monkeys to the basic prosimian pattern. They had prehensile tails like some of the monkeys, they built nests like the apes—

And they had brains like men.

They were unique. They did not fit neatly into the categories

that had been established on another world many light-years away.

Their eyes were huge and night-adapted. They did not see well in bright sunlight, but their vision in the dark was better than a man's. Even so, they relied very little on visual cues. They did not communicate by facial expressions, by postures, by gestures. Even their language was limited, not so much in its structure as in the situations where it was used. The man-things retained a wet-nosed snout, and they communicated largely by smells. They had special glands on their forearms and in their armpits. They smeared secretions from these glands on the branches where they lived, sometimes using their tails to reach the armpit glands. In the darkness it was a safe and sure method of communicating, and it was a technique that man could not share. Man had neither the glands nor the sensitive nose; he could neither send nor receive. The man-things did almost everything with smells: they marked their territories, indicated shades of feeling, reached decisions about common action. Their courtship and mating behavior was almost entirely regulated by scents. Their children did not cry—they emitted pleading smells.

The man-things had opposable thumbs on their hands, and could also oppose the big toes on their

feet. Some of their digits had nails, others claws. They were clever with their hands, and they knew how to make things—nests, water containers, ropes. Still, their culture did not have a technological slant. They had few tools. They did not seem to trust tools, possibly because of the experience of the ground-dwelling primates who had not been able to compete with the big cats. It was also true that the man-things tended to be nomadic, and it was not easy to carry artifacts around in the trees.

Technology, Alston supposed, was in the last analysis one way of adapting. The man-things had taken a different route.

It was a strange culture, a culture without songs or jokes or games. It was a solemn culture, but it stayed on an even keel. It was efficient. It went on through the millennia with very little change, almost as though the man-things were waiting for something, biding their time. . . .

The creatures never became friendly. Alston doubted that they felt compassion or pity. And yet the fact remained that they were willing to help the three men. They were willing to help to the extent of undertaking a long and difficult trip, possibly even a dangerous trip.

Why?

Through all the empty days and uneasy nights that question

burned in Alston's brain.

Why?

One day, the inevitable happened.

The men made a mistake. The time for decision was suddenly thrust upon them.

Roger Pennock began to deteriorate rapidly. Rog was all skin and bones. He was so nervous that he twitched constantly. It was hard to see in him the man he had formerly been—a balding biologist, inclined to be overweight, a man who had always been slow and methodical in his actions. Rog was very close to being mad with fear.

In the early afternoon he crawled over to Alston's nest. His eyes were wild. "I want your knife," he said.

Alston looked at him. "Knife? What for?"

"I want your knife!" Roger's voice was almost a scream.

"Sure, Rog. No problem. But what are you going to do with it?" Alston was anything but eager to surrender his knife.

Roger smiled. His voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "I'm going to even up the odds a little. I'm going to give us a fighting chance."

"How are you going to do that?"

Roger stuck his head into the nest. Alston could see the muscles working in his face. "I'm

going to make myself a spear."

Brother, Alston thought. *That's all we need.* "Now look, Rog. We can't attack these things. We can't even threaten them. You don't have to like them, but they're the only hope we have—"

Roger drew back, offended. "You think I'm crazy!"

"Of course not, Rog. But—"

"But nothing! You keep saying we have to use our heads. Well, I'm using mine. I don't want to use the spear on *them*. We have to come down out of these trees eventually, don't we? When we do, even if we stay in the forest, we have to be able to protect ourselves. I can make a spear. Just a nice straight shaft of wood with a sharp point on one end. I can cut it from a branch, right over there on that trail." He waved. "It's better than nothing, isn't it? *Isn't it?*"

Alston hesitated. It did make a kind of sense. The man-things didn't object to weapons, even if they did not use them. If he could be sure that Roger wouldn't flip his wig and stick the wrong animal, it might be a good idea. It would make Roger feel more secure, if nothing else.

"Okay," he said. "You make your spear. But it stays in my nest until we go down to the ground. I don't want you to hurt yourself if you get another fainting spell. Is that a deal?"

"It's a deal." The biologist

grinned, more sanely this time. "Hey, we may get out of this thing yet!"

Alston gave him the knife.

Roger crawled out along the branch. He straddled the limb and reached out to test another nearby branch. It was good living wood but not big enough to support a man's weight. The limb was situated just over one of the trails used by the man-things; Alston had seen them catch hold of it a dozen times without ever thinking of it as a possible weapon.

Roger opened the knife. It wasn't much of a tool—just a pocket knife that Alston had used to clean his pipe—but it had a pretty good blade on it. It would get the job done if a man had plenty of time.

Roger had plenty of time.

He began to notch the limb, working around in a circle. It was slow work, more whittling than anything else. White chips of fresh wood drifted down toward the forest floor. Roger broke out in a sweat, but he looked happier than he had been in many days. He even hummed a little tune as he sawed away on the limb.

It took him hours. The sun floated down in the sky, and black shadows splashed the trees. A light breeze began to blow.

The man-things moved in their nests.

Roger got his cut deep enough so that the limb began to sag.

He put the knife in his pocket and gripped the branch with both hands. He pulled, hard.

The limb cracked. It broke at the cut but did not fall.

"Timber!" Roger yelled, smiling.

He began to saw at the fibers that held the branch in place.

There was no warning none at all. The man-things came out of their nests, full awake. Their faces were as expressionless as ever. They made no sound. Their yellow eyes gleamed.

They surrounded Roger.

They picked him up in their incredibly strong arms and threw him from the branch. This time he screamed. He screamed until he hit a limb far below. The screaming stopped. He bounced off the limb and kept on going. He hit the forest floor with a muffled, final thud.

Tony came out of his nest, his fists clenched. Alston caught him and held him. "Wait," he hissed.

"They killed him, killed him in cold blood—"

Alston felt the blood pounding in his head. It was all he could do to hold himself in check. "Wait! We can't help Roger now."

"We'll be next—"

"No. Look. They're drawing back. They're not angry at us. It was something he did—"

The man-things ignored the two men. Some of them reached out and fingered the broken limb.

They tried to lift it back into place, but too much of the wood had been cut away. They let it drop again. They abandoned it and began to feed. They offered no word of explanation. The two men were just there, and the situation seemed to be the same as it had been before.

"Fool!" Alston said.

"He didn't do anything to hurt them. He was just trying—"

"Not him. Not Rog. I was the fool. I should have thought, I should have seen . . ."

Tony shook his head, looking down.

"Oh, I was the big brain, the cool-headed thinker." Alston groaned and pushed his hair out of his eyes. "Don't you see, Tony? That limb he was cutting—it was a part of their *trail*. They used it for a hand-hold—you've seen them do it, and so have I. This damned forest is their *home*. We don't understand them, no. But they don't understand us either. To them what Rog did was a wanton act of destruction. It may have been more than that. Those things break off twigs. They build nests close to the trunks of the trees. But they don't snap off limbs that they need for their pathways. The *need* those limbs, especially in the dark. It may be a taboo of some kind—"

"That doesn't help. Rog is dead."

"I know, I know. I'm respon-

sible. I feel like hell about it, but we've got to try to understand."

"Understand!" Tony snorted. "We'll never understand, not in a thousand years."

Alston looked at him. "Okay, Tony. Do you want to wade into them? We might get one or two before they get us. I'll go with you if that's what you want."

Tony flushed. "Sorry. But that scream of his—"

"I know. I'll hear it as long as I live. But Rog wouldn't want us to sacrifice ourselves in a meaningless act of revenge. Rog wanted to get home. All we can do for him now is to try to make his death mean something. I'm not ready to quit. I don't think you are, either."

"Never mind the fine words. What can we *do*?"

Alston leaned against the tree, his stomach in knots. "We've got to get going. We have to take a stab at it, ready or not. We've been lucky, fantastically lucky. We'll make another mistake before long. How can we help it when we don't know the rules? It might be anything—we might just smell wrong. It's now or never. It's time to leave the nest."

"We haven't got a chance, you know. Five hundred miles—it's impossible."

"Do you want to stay here? Now?"

There could only be one an-

swer to that question.

The two men got themselves ready to face the creatures that were their only hope—man-things, rescuers, killers—

Far below them, there was only silence from the night-shadowed forest floor.

The strong dry fingers released his wrists. Alston dropped the final few feet to the forest floor. He stood there in the cathedral hush, trying to catch his balance. His feet had not touched the ground in months. He felt utterly strange, an alien to his own environment.

Tony dropped down beside him. He stumbled, clutched at a tree for support.

The man-things withdrew into the upper branches. They said no word of farewell.

The two men were alone.

They found Roger's broken, swollen body. Two days on the warm forest floor had not made him a pretty sight. Alston and Tony scooped out a shallow grave in the soft soil and buried him as well as they could. Alston located his knife and put it back in his ragged pocket.

It was still early morning. The pale sunlight filtered down from the world they had left. The man-things would be going to sleep. If they missed the rendezvous—

Well, it was best not to think about that.

Alston took a deep breath. "Let's go, *amigo*. Five miles a day if we're lucky. Call it four months back to home plate. We can do it. Just take it day by day."

Tony shrugged. "Nothing like a little exercise," he said.

They had no compass. They were afraid to move into the open country where they could use the sun and the stars to orient themselves. The great forest looked the same everywhere. It was a maze, a green living maze.

"There," Alston said, pointing. The marker was in place. It was a circle of yellow leaves fastened to the trunk of a tree just below where the branches began. It stood out clearly against the black bark. Each night the man-things would blaze the trail ahead. The two men only had to follow that trail—and survive.

They started.

There was little underbrush in this part of the forest. The way was open. But it was hot and sticky in the gloom of the forest floor. The men had no shoes. They were weak from their diet of fruits and eggs. They had to learn how to walk all over again.

They walked. They walked through a nightmare day. They walked through heat and swarms of insects and warm soaking rains. Their feet were cut and bleeding. Their bodies ached. They followed the markers, trusting be-

cause they had to trust.

They were close to exhaustion when the long afternoon shadows came, stumbling like drunken men. They could hear the roaring of the big cats, close, fearfully close—

The man-things met them. They pulled them into the trees, settled them in prepared nests. They fed them, gave them water. The creatures gave no sign that they were glad to see them, spoke no word of greeting. But they did what was necessary. They kept them going.

Alston lay in his nest, a nest that had become safe and familiar. For long hours he was too tired to sleep. The vast night rustled and whispered around him. The same unanswerable question buzzed through his brain, merging with the croaking of the tree frogs.

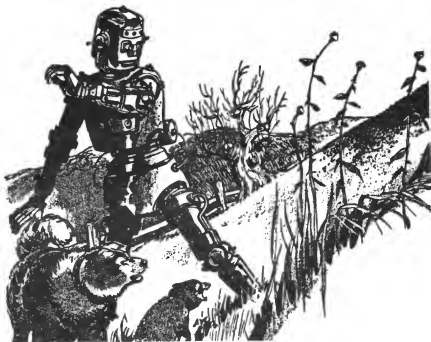
Why?

It was hard to keep track of time, hard to think, hard to do anything except walk until you could walk no more and then fall into a nest for troubled sleep.

It was like living in a dream, a dream where all movements were in slow motion, a dream where day and night fused together in liquid green light. It was a dream where phantoms walked at your side through the forest gloom, phantoms that were as solid and substantial as rocks but could not

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THE TROUBLE WITH ANTS



The last—some say the finest—of Simak's masterful "City" series, this one set so far in the future that even the name of Man has been forgotten by the intelligent Dogs who rule the Earth. But now that reign is threatened by terrifying ants who in one short century construct a "Building" that covers a township—a "shadow-shape" that one day may spread over the entire world!

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Illustrated By Rod Ruth

BY CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

ARCHIE the little renegade raccoon, crouched on the hillside, trying to catch one of the tiny, scurrying things running in the grass. Rufus, Archie's robot, tried to talk to Archie, but the raccoon was too busy and he did not answer.

Homer did a thing no Dog had ever done before. He crossed the river and trotted into the wild robots' camp and he was scared, for there was no telling what the wild robots might do to him when they turned around and saw him. But he was worried worse than he was scared, so he trotted on.

Deep in a secret nest, ants dreamed and planned for a world they could not understand. And pushed into that world, hoping for the best, aiming at a thing no Dog, or robot, or man could ever

hope to understand.

In Geneva, John Webster rounded out his ten-thousandth year of suspended animation and slept on, not stirring. In the street outside, a wandering breeze rustled the leaves along the boulevard, but no one heard and no one saw.

Jenkins strode across the hill and did not look to either left or right, for there were things he did not wish to see. There was a tree that stood where another tree had stood in another world. There was the lay of ground that had been imprinted on his brain with a billion footsteps across ten thousand years.

And, if one listened closely, one might have heard laughter echoing down the ages... the sardonic laughter of a legendary man re-

membered only as Joe.

Archie caught one of the scurrying things and held it clutched within his tight-shut paw. Carefully he lifted the paw and opened it and the thing was there, running madly, trying to escape.

"Archie," said Rufus, "you aren't listening to me."

The scurrying thing dived into Archie's fur, streaked swiftly up his forearm.

"Might have been a flea," said Archie. He sat up and scratched his belly.

"New kind of flea," he said. "Although I hope it wasn't. Just the ordinary kind are bad enough."

"You aren't listening," said Rufus.

"I'm busy," said Archie. "The grass is full of them things. Got to find out what they are."

"I'm leaving you, Archie."

"You're what!"

"Leaving you," said Rufus. "I'm going to the Building."

"You're crazy," fumed Archie. "You can't do a thing like that to me. You've been tetch'd ever since you fell into that ant hill. . . ."

"I've had the Call," said Rufus. "I just got to go."

"I've been good to you," the racoon pleaded. "I've never overworked you. You've been like a pal of mine instead of like a robot. I've always treated you just like

one of us — an animal."

Rufus shook his head stubbornly. "You can't make me stay," he said. "I couldn't stay, no matter what you did. I got the Call and I got to go."

"It isn't like I could get another robot," Archie argued. "They drew my number and I ran away. I'm a deserter and you know I am. You know I can't get another robot with the wardens watching for me."

Rufus just stood there.

"I need you," Archie told him. "You got to stay and help me rustle grub. I can't go near none of the feeding places or the wardens will nab me and drag me up to Webster Hill. You got to help me dig a den. Winter's coming on and I will need a den. It won't have heat or light, but I got to have one. And you've got to. . . ."

Rufus had turned around and was walking down the hill, heading for the river trail. Down the river trail . . . traveling toward the dark smudge above the far horizon.

Archie sat hunched against the wind that ruffled through his fur, tucked his tail around his feet. The wind had a chill about it, a chill it had not held an hour or so before. And it was not the chill of the weather, but the chill of other things.

His bright, beady eyes searched the hillside and there was no sign of Rufus.

No food, no den, no robot. Hunted by the wardens. Eaten up by fleas.

And the Building, a smudge against the farther hills across the river valley.

A hundred years ago, so the records said, the Building had been no bigger than the Webster House.

But it had grown since . . . a place that never was completed. First it had covered an acre. And then a square mile. Now finally a township. And still it grew, sprawling out and towering up.

A smudge above the hills and a cloudy terror for the little, superstitious forest folks who watched it. A word to frighten kit and whelp and cub into sudden quiet.

For there was evil in it . . . the evil of the unknown, an understood evil, an evil sensed and attributed rather than seen or heard or smelled. A sensed evil, especially in the dark of night, when the lights were out and the wind keened in the den's mouth and the other animals were sleeping, while one lay awake and listened to the pulsing *otherness* that sang between the worlds.

Archie blinked in the autumn sunlight, scratched furtively at his side.

Maybe someday he told himself, someone will find a way to handle fleas. Something to rub on one's fur so they will stay

away. Or a way to reason with them, to reach them and talk things over with them. Maybe set up a reservation for them, a place where they could stay and be fed and not bother animals. Or something of the sort. . .

As it was, there wasn't much that could be done. You scratched yourself. You had your robot pick them off, although the robot usually got more fur than fleas. You rolled in the sand or dust. You went for a swim and drowned some of them . . . well, you really didn't drown them; you just washed them off and if some of them drowned that was their own tough luck.

You had your robot pick them off . . . but now there was no robot.

No robot to pick off fleas.

No robot to help him hunt for food.

But, Archie remembered, there was a black haw tree down in the river bottom and last night's frost would have touched the fruit. He smacked his lips, thinking of the haws. And there was a cornfield just over the ridge. If one was fast enough and bided his time and was sneaky about it, it was no trouble at all to get an ear of corn. And if worse came to worse there always would be roots and wild acorns and that patch of wild grapes over on the sand bar.

Let Rufus go, said Archie, mum-

bling to himself. Let the Dogs keep their feeding stations. Let the wardens go on watching.

He would live his own life. He would eat fruit and grub for roots and raid the cornfields, even as his remote ancestors had eaten fruit and grubbed for roots and raided fields.

He would live as the other raccoons had lived before the Dogs had come along with their ideas about the Brotherhood of Beasts. Like animals had lived before they could talk with words, before they could read the printed books that the Dogs provided, before they had the robots that served in lieu of hands, before there was warmth and light for dens.

Yes, and before there was a drawing that told you if you stayed on Earth or went to another world.

The Dogs, Archie remembered, had been quite persuasive about it, very reasonable and suave. Some animals, they said, had to go to the other worlds, or there would be too many animals on Earth. Earth wasn't big enough, they said, to hold everyone. And a drawing, they pointed out, was the fair way to decide which of them would go to the other worlds.

And, after all, they said, the other worlds would be almost like the Earth. For they were just extensions of the Earth. Just other worlds following in the track of

Earth. Not quite like it, perhaps, but very close. Just a minor difference here and there. Maybe no tree where there was a tree on Earth. Maybe an oak tree where Earth had a walnut tree. Maybe a spring of fresh, cold water where there was no such spring on Earth.

Maybe, Homer had told him, growing very enthusiastic . . . maybe the world he would be assigned to would be a better world than Earth.

Archie hunched against the hillside, felt the warmish sun of autumn cutting through the cold chile of autumn's wind. He thought about the black haws. They would be soft and mushy and there would be some of them lying on the ground. He would eat those that were on the ground, then he'd climb the tree and pick some more and then he'd climb down again and finish off the ones he had shaken loose with his climbing of the tree.

He'd eat them and take them in his paws and smear them on his face. He might even roll in them.

Out of the corner of one eye, he saw the scurrying things running in the grass. Like ants, he thought, only they weren't ants. At least, not like any ants he'd ever seen before.

Fleas, maybe. A new kind of flea.

His paw darted out and snatched one up. He felt it running in his

palm. He opened the paw and saw it running there and closed the paw again.

He raised his paw to his ear and listened.

The thing he'd caught was ticking!

The wild robot camp was not at all the way Homer had imagined it would be. It was not a camp and it was not a city. It was scarcely anything. There were no buildings and there were no streets. Just launching ramps and three spaceships and half a dozen robots working on one of the ships.

Although, come to think of it, Homer told himself, one should have known there would be no buildings in a robot camp. For the robots would have no use of shelter and that was all a building was.

Homer was scared, but he tried hard not to show it. He curled his tail over his back and carried his head high and his ears well forward and trotted toward the little group of robots, never hesitating. When he reached them, he sat down and lolled out his tongue and waited for one of them to speak.

But when none of them did, he screwed up his courage and spoke to them, himself.

"My name is Homer," he said, "and I represent the Dogs. If you have a head robot, I would

like to talk to him."

The robots kept on working for a minute, but finally one of them turned around and came over and squatted down beside Homer so that his head was level with the dog's head. All the other robots kept on working as if nothing had happened.

"I am a robot called Andrew," said the robot squatting next to Homer, "and I am not what you would call the head robot, for we have no such thing among us. But I can speak with you."

"I came to you about the Building" Homer told him.

"I take it," said the robot called Andrew, "that you are speaking of the structure to the northeast of us. The one you can see from here if you just turn around."

"That's the one," said Homer. "I came to ask why you are building it."

"But we aren't building it," said Andrew.

"We have seen robots working on it."

"Yes, there are robots working there. But we are not building it."

"You are helping someone else?"

Andrew shook his head. "Some of us get a call . . . a call to go and work there. The rest of us do not try to stop them, for we are all free agents."

"But who is building it?" asked Homer.

"The ants," said Andrew.

Homer's jaw dropped slack.

"Ants? You mean the insects. The little things that live in ant hills?"

"Precisely," said Andrew. He made the fingers of one hand run across the sand like a harried ant.

"But they couldn't build a place like that," protested Homer. "They are stupid."

"Not any more," said Andrew.

Homer sat stock still, frozen to the sand, felt chilly feet of terror run along his nerves.

"Not any more," said Andrew, talking to himself. "Not stupid any more. You see once upon a time, there was a man named Joe..."

"A man? What's that?" asked Homer.

The robot made a clucking noise as if gently chiding Homer.

"Men were animals," he said. "Animals that went on two legs. They looked very much like us except they were flesh and we are metal."

"You must mean the websters," said Homer. "We know about things like that, but we call them websters."

The robot nodded slowly. "Yes, the websters could be men. There was a family of them by that name. Lived just across the river."

"There's a place called Webster House," said Homer. "It stands on Webster Hill."

"That's the place," said Andrew.

"We keep it up," said Homer. "It's a shrine to us, but we don't understand just why. It is the word that has been passed down to us . . . we must keep Webster House."

"The Websters," Andrew told him, "were the ones that taught you Dogs to speak."

Homer stiffened. "No one taught us to speak. We taught ourselves. We developed in the course of many years. And we taught the other animals."

Andres, the robot sat hunched in the sun, nodding his head as if he might be thinking to himself.

"Ten thousand years," he said. "No, I guess it's nearer twelve. Around eleven, maybe."

Homer waited and as he waited he sensed the weight of years that pressed against the hills . . . the years of river and of sun, of sand and wind and sky.

And the years of Andrew.

"You are old," he said. "You can remember that far back?"

"Yes," said Andrew. "Although I am one of the last of the man-made robots. I was made just a few years before they went to Jupiter."

Homer sat silently, tumult stirring in his brain.

Man . . . a new word.

An animal that went on two legs.

An animal that made the robots, that taught the Dogs to talk.

And, as if he might be reading Homer's mind, Andrew spoke to him.

"You should not have stayed away from us," he said. "We should have worked together. We worked together once. We both would have gained if we had worked together."

"We were afraid of you," said Homer. "I am still afraid of you."

"Yes," said Andrew. "Yes, I suppose you would be. I suppose Jenkins kept you afraid of us. For Jenkins was a smart one. He knew that you must start afresh. He knew that you must not carry the memory of Man as a dead weight on your necks."

Homer sat silently.

"And we," the robot said, "are nothing more than the memory of Man. We do the things he did, although more scientifically, for, since we are machines, we must be scientific. More patiently than Man, because we have forever and he had a few short years."

Andrew drew two lines in the sand, crossed them with two other lines. He made an X in the open square in the upper left hand corner.

"You think I'm crazy," he said. "You think I'm talking through my hat."

Homer wriggled his haunches deeper into the sand.

"I don't know what to think," he said. "All these years . . ."

Andrew drew an O with his finger in the center square of the crosshatch he had drawn in the sand.

"I know," he said. "All these years you have lived with a dream. The idea that the Dogs were the prime movers. And the facts are hard to understand, hard to reconcile. Maybe it would be just as well if you forgot what I said. Facts are painful things at times. A robot has to work with them, for they are the only things he has to work with. We can't dream, you know. Facts are all we have."

"We passed fact long ago," Homer told him. "Not that we don't use it, for there are times we do. But we work in other ways. Intuition and cobblyng and listening."

"You aren't mechanical," said Andrew. "For you, two and two are not always four, but for us it must be four. And sometimes I wonder if tradition doesn't blind us. I wonder sometimes if two and two may not be something more or less than four."

They squatted in silence, watching the river, a flood of molten silver tumbling down a colored land.

Andrew made an X in the upper right hand corner of the crosshatch, an O in the center upper space, and X in the center lower space. With the flat of his hand, he rubbed the sand smooth.

"I never win," he said. "I'm

too smart for myself."

"You were telling me about the ants," said Homer. "About them not being stupid any more."

"Oh, yes," said Andrew. "I was telling you about a man named Joe..."

Jenkins strode across the hill and did not look to either left or right, for there were things he did not wish to see, things that struck too deeply into memory. There was a tree that stood where another tree had stood in another world. There was the lay of ground that has been imprinted on his brain with a billion footsteps across ten thousand years.

The weak winter sun of afternoon flickered in the sky, flickered like a candle guttering in the wind, and when it steadied and there was no flicker it was moonlight and not sunlight at all.

Jenkins checked his stride and swung around and the house was there . . . low set against the ground, sprawled across the hill, like a sleepy young thing that clung close to mother earth.

Jenkins took a hesitant step and as he moved his metal body glowed and sparkled in the moonlight that had been sunlight a short heartbeat ago.

From the river valley came the sound of a night bird crying and a racoon was whimpering in a cornfield just below the ridge.

Jenkins took another step and

prayed the house would stay . . . although he knew it couldn't because it wasn't there. For this was an empty hilltop that had never known a house. This was another world in which no house existed.

The house remained, dark and silent, no smoke from the chimneys, no light from the windows, but with remembered lines that one could not mistake.

Jenkins moved slowly, carefully, afraid the house would leave, afraid that he would startle it and it would disappear.

But the house stayed put. And there were other things. The tree at the corner had been an elm and now it was an oak, as it had been before. And it was autumn moon instead of winter sun. The breeze was blowing from the west and not out of the north.

Somthing happened, thought Jenkins. The thing that has been growing on me. The thing I felt and could not understand. An ability developing? Or a new sense finally reaching light? Or a power I never dreamed I had.

A power to walk between the worlds at will. A power to go anywhere I choose by the shortest route that the twisting lines of force and happenstance can conjure up for me.

He walked less carefully and the house still stayed, unfrightened, solid and substantial.

He crossed the grass-grown

patio and stood before the door.

Hesitantly, he put out a hand and laid it on the latch. And the latch was there. No phantom thing, but substantial metal.

Slowly he lifted it and the door swung in and he stepped across the threshold.

After five thousand years, Jenkins had come home . . . back to Webster House.

So there was a man named Joe. Not a webster, but a man. For a webster was a man. And the Dogs had not been first.

Homer lay before the fire, a limp pile of fur and bone and muscle, with his paws stretched out in front of him and his head resting on his paws. Through half closed eyes he saw the fire and shadow, felt the heat of the blazing logs reach out and fluff his fur.

But inside his brain he saw the sand and the squatting robot and the hills with the years upon them.

Andrew had squatted in the sand and talked, with the autumn sun shining on his shoulders . . . had talked of men and dogs and ants. Of a thing that had happened when Nathaniel was alive, and that was a time long gone, for Nathaniel was the first Dog.

There had been a man named Joe . . . a mutant-man, a more-than-man. . . who had wondered about ants twelve thousand years

ago. Wondered why they had progressed so far and then no farther, why they had reached the dead end of destiny.

Hunger, perhaps, Joe had reasoned . . . the ever pressing need to garner food so that they might live. Hibernation, perhaps, the stagnation of the winter sleep, the broken memory chain, the starting over once again, each year a genesis for ants.

So, Andrew said, his bald pate gleaming in the sun, Joe had picked one hill, had set himself up as a god to change the destiny of ants. He had fed them, so that they need not strive with hunger. He had enclosed their hill in a dome of glassite and had heated it so they need not hibernate.

And the thing had worked. The ants advanced. They fashioned carts and they smelted ore. This much one could know, for the carts were on the surface and acrid smelting smoke came from the chinneys that thrust up from the hill. What other things they did, what other things they learned, deep down in their tunnels, there was no way of knowing.

Joe was crazy, Andrew said. Crazy. . . and yet, maybe not so crazy either.

For one day he broke the dome of glassite and tore the hill asunder with his foot, then turned and walked away, not caring any

more what happened to the ants.

But the ants had cared.

The hand that broke the dome, the foot that ripped the hill had put the ants on the road to greatness. It had made them fight . . . fight to keep the things they had, fight to keep the bottleneck of destiny from closing once again.

A kick in the pants, said Andrew. A kick in the pants for ants. A kick in the right direction.

Twelve thousand years ago a broken trampled hill. Today a mighty building that grew with each passing year. A building that had covered a township in one short century, that would cover a hundred townships in the next. A building that would push out and take the land. Land that belonged, not to ants, but animals.

A building . . . and that was not quite right, although it had been called the Building from the very start. For a building was a shelter, a place to hide from storm and cold. The ants would have no need of that, for they had their tunnels and their hills.

Why would an ant build a place that sprawled across a township in a hundred years and yet that kept on growing? What possible use could an ant have for a place like that?

Homer nuzzled his chin deep into his paws, growled inside his throat.

There was no way of knowing. For first you had to know how an ant would think. You would have to know her ambition and her goal. You would have to probe her knowledge.

Twelve thousand years of knowledge. Twelve thousand years from a starting point that itself was unknowable.

But one had to know. There must be a way to know.

For, year after year, the Building would push out. A mile across, and then six miles and after that a hundred. A hundred miles and then another hundred and after that the world.

Retreat, thought Homer. Yes, we could retreat. We could migrate to those other worlds, the worlds that follow us in the stream of time, the worlds that treat on one another's heels. We could give the Earth to ants and there still would be space for us.

But this is home. This is where the Dogs arose. This is where we taught the animals to talk and think and act together. This is the place where we created the Brotherhood of Beasts.

For it does not matter who came first . . . the webster or the dog. This place is home. Our home as well as webster's home. Our home as well as ants'.

And we must stop the ants. There must be a way to stop them. A way to talk to them, find

out what they want. A way to reason with them. Some basis for negotiation. Some agreement to be reached.

Homer lay motionless on the hearth and listened to the whisperings that ran through the house, the soft, far-off padding of robots on their rounds of duties, the muted talk of Dogs in a room upstairs, the crackling of the flames as they ate along the log.

A good life, said Homer, muttering to himself. A good life and we thought we were the ones who made it. Although Andrew says it wasn't us. Andrew says we have not added one iota to the mechanical skill and mechanical logic that was our heritage — and that we have lost a lot. He spoke of chemistry and he tried to explain, but I couldn't understand. The study of elements, he said, and things like molecules and atoms. And electronics . . . although he said we did certain things without the benefit of electronics more wonderfully than man could have done with all his knowledge. You might study electronics for a million years, he said, and not reach those other worlds, not even know they're there . . . and we did it, we did a thing a webster could not do.

Because we think differently than a webster does. No, it's man, not webster.

And the robots. The robots are

no better than the ones that were left to us by man. A minor modification here and there . . . an obvious modification, but no real improvement.

Who ever would have dreamed there could be a better robot?

A better ear of corn, yes. Or a better walnut tree. Or a wild rice that would grow a fuller head. A better way to make the yeast that substitutes for meat.

But a better robot . . . why, a robot does everything we might wish that it could do. Why should it be better?

And yet . . . the robots receive a call and go off to work on the Building, to build a thing that will push us off the Earth.

We do not understand. Of course, we cannot understand. If we knew our robots better, we might understand. Understanding, we might fix it so that the robots would not receive the call, or, receiving it, would pay it no attention.

And that, of course, would be the answer. If the robots did not work, there would be no building. For the ants, without the aid of robots, could not go on with their building.

A flea ran along Homer's scalp and he twitched his ear.

Although Andrew might be wrong, he told himself. We have our legend of the rise of the Brotherhood of Beasts and the wild robots have their legend of the

fall of man. At this date, who is there to tell which of the two is right?

But Andrew's story does tie in. There were Dogs and there were robots and when man fell they went their separate ways . . . although we kept some of the robots to serve as hands for us. Some robots stayed with us, but no dogs stayed with the robots.

A late autumn fly buzzed out of a corner, bewildered in the firelight. It buzzed around Homer's head and settled on his nose. Homer glared at it and it lifted its legs and insolently brushed its wings. Homer dabbed at it with a paw and it flew away.

A knock came at the door.

Homer lifted his head and blinked at the knocking sound.

"Come in," he finally said.

It was the robot, Hezekiah.

"They caught Archie," Hezekiah said.

"Archie?"

"Archie, the raccoon."

"Oh, yes," said Homer. "He was the one that ran away."

"They have him out here now," said Hezekiah. "Do you want to see him?"

"Send them in," said Homer.

Hezekiah beckoned with his finger and Archie ambled through the door. His fur was matted with burrs and his tail was dragging. Behind him stalked two robot wardens.

"He tried to steal some corn,"

one of the wardens said, "and we spotted him, but he led us quite a chase."

Homer sat up ponderously and stared at Archie. Archie stared straight back.

"They never would have caught me," Archie said, "if I'd still had Rufus. Rufus was my robot and he would have warned me."

"And where is Rufus now?"

"He got the call today," said Archie, "and left me for the Building."

"Tell me," said Homer. "Did anything happen to Rufus before he left? Anything unusual? Out of the ordinary?"

"Nothing," Archie told him, "Except that he fell into an ant hill. He was a clumsy robot. A regular stumble bum... always tripping himself, getting tangled up. He wasn't co-ordinated just the way he should be. He had a screw loose someplace."

Something black and tiny jumped off of Archie's nose, raced along the floor. Archie's paw went out in a lightning stroke and scooped it up.

"You better move back a ways," Hezekiah warned Homer. "He's simply dripping fleas."

"It's not a flea," said Archie, puffing up in anger. "It is something else. I caught it this afternoon. It ticks and it looks like an ant, but it isn't one."

The thing that ticked oozed between Archie's claws and tum-

bled to the floor. It landed right side up and was off again. Archie made a stab at it, but it zig-zagged out of reach. Like a flash it reach Hezekiah and streaked up his leg.

Homer came to his feet in a sudden flash of knowledge.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Get it! Catch it! Don't let it. . ."

But the thing was gone.

Slowly Homer sat down again. His voice was quiet now, quiet and almost deadly.

"Wardens," he said, "Take Hezekiah into custody. Don't leave his side, don't let him get away. Report to me everything he does."

Hezekiah backed away.

"But I haven't done a thing."

"No," said Homer, softly. "No, you haven't yet. But you will. You'll get the Call and you'll try to desert us for the Building. And before we let you go, we'll find out what it is that made you do it. What it is and how it works."

Homer turned around, a dog-gish grin wrinkling up his face.

"And, now, Archie. . ."

But there was no Archie.

There was an open window. And there was no Archie.

Homer stirred on his bed of hay, unwilling to awake, a growl gurgling in his throat.

Getting old, he thought. Too many years upon me, like the years upon the hills. There was a

time when I'd be out of bed at the first sound of something at the door, on my feet, with hay sticking in my fur, barking my head off to let the robots know.

The knock came again and Homer staggered to his feet.

"Come in," he yelled. "Cut out the racket and come in."

The door opened and it was a robot, but a bigger robot than Homer had ever seen before. A gleaming robot, huge and massive, with a polished body that shone like slow fire even in the dark. And riding on the robot's shoulder was Archie, the raccoon.

"I am Jenkins," said the robot. "I came back tonight."

Homer gulped and sat down very slowly.

"Jenkins," he said. "There are stories . . . legends . . . from the long ago."

"No more than a legend?" Jenkins asked.

"That's all," said Homer, "A legend of a robot that looked after us. Although Andrew spoke of Jenkins this afternoon as if he might have known him. And there is a story of how the Dogs gave you a body on your seven thousandth birthday and it was a marvelous body that. . ."

His voice ran down . . . for the body of the robot that stood before him with the raccoon perched on his shoulder . . . that body could be none other than the birthday gift.

"And Webster House?" asked Jenkins. "You still keep Webster House?"

"We still keep Webster House," said Homer. "We keep it as it is. It's a thing we have to do."

"The websters?"

"There aren't any websters."

Jenkins nodded at that. His body's hair-trigger sense had told him there were no websters. There were no webster vibrations. There was no thought of websters in the minds of things he'd touched.

And that was as it should be.

He came slowly across the room, soft-footed as a cat despite his mighty weight, and Homer felt him moving, felt the friendliness and kindness of the metal creature, the protectiveness of the ponderous strength within him.

Jenkins squatted down beside him.

"You are in trouble," Jenkins said. Homer stared at him.

"The ants," said Jenkins. "Archie told me. Said you were troubled by the ants."

"I went to Webster House to hide," said Archie. "I was scared you would hunt me down again and I thought that Webster House..."

"Hush, Archie," Jenkins told him. "You don't know a thing about it. You told me that you didn't. You just said the Dogs were having some kind of sticky

trouble with the ants."

He looked at Homer.

"I suppose they are Joe's ants," he said.

"So you know about Joe," said Homer. "So there was a man called Joe."

Jenkins chuckled. "Yes, a trouble-maker. But likeable at times. He had the devil in him."

Homer said: "They're building. They get the robots to work for them and they are putting up a building."

"Surely," said Jenkins, "even ants have the right to build."

"But they're building too fast. They'll push us off the Earth. Another thousand years or so and they'll cover the whole Earth if they keep on building at the rate they've been."

"And you have no place to go? That's what worries you."

"Yes we have a place to go. Many places. All the other worlds. The cobbly worlds."

Jenkins nodded gravely. "I was in a cobbly world. The first world after this. I took some websters there five thousand years ago. I just came back tonight. And I know the way you feel. No other world is home. I've hungered for the Earth for almost every one of those five thousand years. I came back to Webster House and I found Archie there. He told me about the ants and so I came up here. I hope you do not mind."

"We are glad you came," said

Homer, shifting on his haunches.

"These ants," said Jenkins. "I suppose you want to stop them."

Homer nodded his head.

"There is a way," said Jenkins. "I know there is a way. The websters had a way if I could just remember. But it's so long ago. And it's a simple way, I know. A very simple way."

His hand came up and scraped back and forth across his chin.

"What are you doing that for?" Archie asked.

"Eh?"

"Rubbing your face that way. What do you do it for?"

Jenkins dropped his hand. "Just a habit, Archie. A webster gesture. A way they had of thinking. I picked it up from them."

"Does it help you think?"

"Well, maybe. Maybe not. It seemed to help the websters. Now what would a webster do in a case like this? The websters could help us. I know they could . . ."

"The websters in the cobbly world," said Homer.

Jenkins shook his head. "There aren't any websters there."

"But you said you took some back."

"I know. But they aren't there now. I've been alone in the cobbly world for almost four thousand years."

"Then there aren't websters anywhere. The rest went to Jupiter. Andrew told me that. Jenkins, where is Jupiter?"

"Yes, there are," said Jenkins.

"There are some websters left, I mean. Or there used to be. A few left at Geneva."

"It won't be easy," Homer said.

"Not even for a webster. Those ants are smart. Archie told you about the flea he found."

"It wasn't any flea," said Archie.

"Yes, he told me," Jenkins said. "Said it got onto Hezekiah."

"Not onto," Homer told them.

"Into is the word. It wasn't a flea . . . it was a robot, a tiny robot. It drilled a hole in Hezekiah's skull and got into his brain. It sealed the hole behind it."

"And what is Hezekiah doing now?"

"Nothing," said Homer. "But we are pretty sure what he will do as soon as the ant robot gets the setup fixed. He'll get the Call. He'll get the call to go and work on the Building."

Jenkins nodded. "Taking over," he said. "They can't do a job like that themselves, so they take control of things that can."

He lifted his hand again and scraped it across his chin.

"I wonder if Joe knew," he mumbled. "When he played god to the ants I wonder if he knew."

But that was ridiculous. Joe never could have known. Even a mutation like Joe could not have looked twelve thousand years ahead.

So long ago, thought Jenkins. So many things have happened. Bruce Webster was just starting to experiment with dogs, had no more than dreamed his dream of talking, thinking dogs that would go down the path of destiny paw in hand with Man ... not knowing then that Man within a few short centuries would scatter to the four winds of eternity and leave the Earth to robot and to dog. Not knowing then that even the name of Man would be forgotten in the dust of years, that the race would come to be known by the name of a single family.

And yet, thought Jenkins, if it was to be any family, the Websters were the ones. I can remember them as if it were yesterday. Those were the days when I thought of myself as a Webster, too.

Lord knows, I tried to be. I did the best I could. I stood by the Webster dogs when the race of men had gone and finally I took the last bothersome survivors of that madcap race into another world to clear the way for Dogs ... so that the Dogs could fashion the Earth in the way they planned.

And now even those last bothersome survivors have gone ... someplace, somewhere ... I wish that I could know. Escaped into some fantasy of the human mind. And the men on Jupiter

are not even men, but something else. And Geneva is shut off ... blocked off from the world.

Although it can't be farther away or blocked more tightly than the world from which I came. If only I could learn how it was I traveled from the exile cobbly world back to Webster House ... then, maybe, perhaps, somehow or other, I could reach Geneva.

A new power, he told himself. A new ability. A thing that grew upon me without my knowing that it grew. A thing that every man and every robot ... and perhaps every dog ... could have if he but knew the way.

Although it may be my body that made it possible ... this body that the Dogs gave me on my seven thousandth birthday. A body that has more than any body of flesh and blood has ever quite attained. A body that can know what a bear is thinking or a fox is dreaming, that can feel the happy little mouse thoughts running in the grass.

Wish fulfillment. That might be it. The answer to the strange, illogical yearnings for things that seldom are and often cannot be. But all of which are possible if one knows the way, if one can grow or develop or graft onto oneself the new ability that directs the mind and body to the fulfillment of the wish.

I walked the hill each day, he remembered. Walked there be-

cause I could not stay away, because the longing was so strong, steeling myself against looking too closely, for there were differences I did not wish to see.

I walked there a million times and it took that many times before the power within me was strong enough to take me back.

For I was trapped. The word, the thought, the concept that took me into the cobbly world was a one way ticket and while it took me there it could not take me back. But there was another way, a way I did not know. That even now I do not know.

"You said there was a way," urged Homer.

"A way?"

"Yes, a way to stop the ants."

Jenkins nodded. "I am going to find out. I'm going to Geneva."

Jon Webster awoke.

And this is strange, he thought, for I said eternity.

I was to sleep forever and forever has no end.

All else was mist and the grey-ness of sleep forgetfulness, but this much stood out with mind-sharp clarity. Eternity, and this was not eternity.

A word ticked at his mind, like feeble tapping on a door that was far away.

He lay and listened to the tapping and the word became two words ... words that spoke his name:

"Jon Webster. Jon Webster." On and on, on and on. Two words tapping at his brain.

"Jon Webster."

"Jon Webster."

"Yes," said Webster's brain and the words stopped and did not come again.

Silence and the thinning of the mists of forgetfulness. And the trickling back of memory. One thing at a time.

There was a city and the name of the city was Geneva.

Men lived in the city, but men without a purpose.

The Dogs lived outside the city...in the whole world outside the city. The Dogs had purpose and a dream.

Sara climbed the hill to take a century of dreams.

And I...I, thought Jon Webster, climbed the hill and asked for eternity. This is not eternity.

"This is Jenkins, Jon Webster."

"Yes, Jenkins," said Jon Webster, and yet he did not say it, not with lip and tongue and throat, for he felt the fluid that pressed around his body inside its cylinder, fluid that fed him and kept him from dehydrating. Fluid that sealed his lips and eyes and ears.

"Yes, Jenkins," said Webster, speaking with his mind. "I remember you. I remember you now. You were with the family from the very first. You helped us teach the Dogs. You stayed

with them when the family was no more."

"I am still with them," said Jenkins.

"I sought eternity," said Webster. "I closed the city and sought eternity."

"We often wondered," Jenkins told him. "Why did you close the city?"

"The Dogs," said Webster's mind. "The Dogs had to have their chance. Man would have spoiled their chance."

"The dogs are doing well," said Jenkins.

"But the city is open now?"

"No, the city still is closed."

"But you are here."

"Yes, but I'm the only one who knows the way. And there will be no others. Not for a long time, anyway."

"Time," said Webster. "I had forgotten time. How long is it, Jenkins?"

"Since you closed the city? Ten thousand years or so."

"And there are others?"

"Yes, but they are sleeping."

"And the robots? The robots still keep watch?"

"The robots still keep watch."

Webster lay quietly and a peace came upon his mind. The city still was closed and the last of men were sleeping. The Dogs were doing well and the robots stayed on watch.

"You should not have wakened me," he said. "You should have

let me remain asleep."

"There was a thing I had to know. I knew it once, but I have forgotten and it is very simple. Simple and yet terribly important."

Webster chuckled in his brain.

"What is it Jenkins?"

"It's about ants," said Jenkins. "Ants used to trouble men. What did you do about it?"

"Why, we poisoned them," said Webster.

Jenkins gasped. "Poisoned them!"

"Yes," said Webster. "A very simple thing. We used a base of syrup, sweet, to attract the ants. And we put poison in it, a poison that was deadly to ants. But we did not put in enough of it to kill them right away. A slow poison, you see, so they would have time to carry it to the nest. That way we killed many instead of just two or three."

Silence hummed in Webster's head. . . the silence of no thought, no word.

"Jenkins," he said. "Jenkins, are you . . ."

"Yes, Jon Webster, I am here."

"That is all you want?"

"That is all I want."

"I can go to sleep again."

"Yes, Jon Webster. Go to sleep again."

Jenkins stood upon the hilltop and felt the first rough forerunning wind of winter whine across

the land. Below him the slope that ran down to the river was etched in black and grey with the leafless skeletons of trees.

To the northeast rose the shadow-shape, the cloud of evil omen that was called the Building. A growing thing spawned in the mind of ants, built for what purpose and to what end no thing but an ant could even closely guess.

But there was a way to deal with ants.

The human way.

The way Jon Webster had told him after ten thousand years of sleep. A simple way and a fundamental way, a brutal, but efficient way. You took some syrup, sweet, so the ants would like it, and you put some poison in it . . . slow poison so it wouldn't work too fast.

The simple way of poison, Jenkins said. The very simple way.

Except it called for chemistry and the Dogs knew no chemistry.

Except it called for killing and there was no killing.

Not even fleas, and the Dogs were pestered plenty by the fleas. Not even ants . . . and the ants threatened to dispossess the animals of the world they called their birthplace.

There had been no killing for five thousand years or more. The idea of killing had been swept from the minds of things.

And it is better that way, Jenkins told himself. Better that one should lose a world than go back to killing.

He turned slowly and went down the hill.

Homer would be disappointed, he told himself.

Terribly disappointed when he found the websters had no way of dealing with the ants . . .

The End

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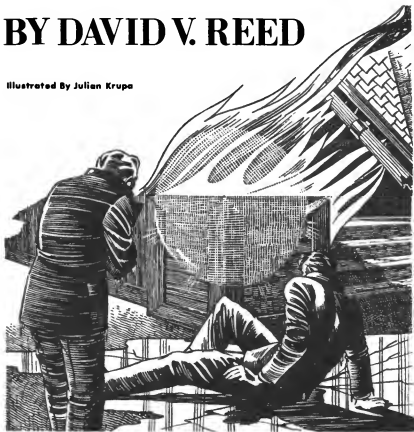
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WHERE IS ROGER DAVIS? BY DAVID V. REED

Illustrated By Julian Krupa



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Ever since Wells' War of the Worlds, s-f writers have had fun showing what might happen if Earth were invaded by the Red Fleets of Mars—none, apparently, with more lightness of touch than David V. Reed, who—in "Where Is Roger Davis?"—came up with the startling idea that the invasion of Earth could begin in the back of a sight-seeing bus parked just a few feet off Broadway!



In my work as a writer, I have often written fiction which I hoped might stir readers, perhaps even excite and startle them. I have written things that made me smile when I heard the old saw about truth being stranger than fiction. Today I don't know, because I don't know what the truth is.

Before you, reader, I lay down these following pages for your judgment. I received them from an old friend of mine, Roger Davis. Roger has often suggested story ideas to me, and I know he has a fertile imagination. Its evident sincerity and desperation to convince me of its truth, and my knowledge of Roger Davis' serious nature, forced me to investigate. I do not deny my skepticism about the ms. At the same time, I include here, in the form of footnotes, the results of my investigation. They constitute

practically my only contribution to these pages; I have divided the ms into sections and clarified the dialogue.

Let me add one thing. I have said I don't know what the truth is. But, if truth is that which corresponds to all other known facts, then you, reader, are about to begin a true story which has no parallel in man's experience.

D.V.R.

Chapter 1

Roger Davis Begins His Story

I AM writing this account of the events of the past weeks from a little hotel in Hayman's Corners, Vermont. It was midnight an hour ago. The countryside is hushed and a summer breeze comes through my window. In all this peace, it is difficult to believe that a few miles from here, deep in the woods on the north shore of Lake Towanda, there still smoulder the embers that have burned my life away. I can still hear the thunder that shook the forest.

When I have finished these pages, I will leave them sealed for delivery to you. I have addressed this to you for the sake of our old friendship, in spite of the fact that I know from every sensible point of view, you are the last person I should have sent this to. You are a fiction writer, and I have too many times aided you in the manufacture of your

synthetic thrills. Because of that you may doubt me now. I beg you to believe me. At no time in my life have I ever wanted someone to believe me as much as I do now. Somehow, in these last hours, it seems terribly important for someone to know this and believe. I swear to you by everything holy that I am telling the truth.

But I must hurry. There are only a few brief hours until dawn, and then I must leave . . .

Tonight makes a month and two days since it began. You may remember that I wrote you about the job I had taken with Jim Hendrix. When college let out for the summer, Jim went to New York, where he got a job as a barker for a sight-seeing bus. He would have taken anything, desperate as he was for money.

You know that I learned long ago that it was useless trying to get him to borrow from me, useless and stupid to offend his bitter pride and self-reliance. Here I was living easily on my inheritance, while he faced a relentless struggle to make ends meet. You know how uneven his temperament was, how he alternated between periods of hilarity and deepest gloom.

But for me there was nothing like his company; a continuation of those nights when we would sit awake in our dorm until morn-

ing, settling the world's ills as only young students can. When you graduated from school two years ago, Jim became my closest friend.

So when he got this job of his, I went along and managed to get hired by the same company as a reserve driver. Even then, Jim could not hide his resentment, feeling that I had taken the job as a lark, while he hated it. And then the pendulum swung back again, and the old Jim was there, the Jim who could have no enemies, and we got along very well.

On this night that I speak of, we had been working together for some two weeks. We had our bus parked along Forty-fourth Street just a few feet off Broadway. It was a Saturday night, early in the evening, and the mad rush of a New York week-end was just beginning. Already the twilight sky blazed with neon, the roar and rumble of automobiles and taxis was a steadily increasing din, people from all over the city were beginning to stream into Times Square. I stood with Jim while he called out for customers. He made an unusual picture of a barker. Tall, blonde, with lean features and somewhat cold eyes, his cultured voice added to his restrained portrait of a Broadway go-getter.

Pretty soon we had a customer, an out-of-towner who looked much the worse for a few drinks. I

took him to the bus and sat him down in the last row. About ten minutes later I escorted two ladies to the bus. But the drunk was now sitting in the front seat, singing to himself. That was all it took; the women glanced at him and executed a neat about-face, deaf to my pleas.

"Hey," I turned to the drunk, annoyed. "Why didn't you stay put? Come on now, back you go."

"Who me?" said the drunk happily. "Not me. S'too crowded back there."

There wasn't a soul in the bus except him. "You'll have to go back," I said. He looked at me unhappily, his eyes sad.

"Don' make me sit with'm," he said. "They scratch me."

"All right," I responded wearily. I had handled his kind before. "I'll make 'em stop scratching you." Holding on to him, I led our first patron back to his seat. "Where are they?" I said. "Point 'em out and I'll give 'em hell." The drunk nodded his head agreeably and pushed his index finger forward. Seemingly in mid-air, he met with an obstruction. He pulled his finger back and put it into his mouth, and he looked unhappy enough to cry.

A little startled by what I took to be his skill in pantomime, I put my hand where the drunk had indicated. To my complete bewilderment I felt a hard surface, rough and glassy like rock

salt, right there in midair! Again I put my hand there, and again. There was no mistaking it. The seat *looked* empty, its black leather upholstery completely . . . but . . . there was an indentation in it . . . as if something—"Hey, Jim!" I yelled, swallowing hard.

In a minute, Jim was beside me. "Put your hand here," I motioned. He looked puzzled, but when he put his hand where I had pointed, the expression he wore was absolutely ludicrous. As I had done, he put his hand back again, and looked at the empty seat. Then, from the way his eyes slowly began to open in a fixed stare, I knew he had seen the indentation.

The drunk rose to his feet. "I'm goin' up front," he announced. "Don't like to have people hiding and scratching me." And down the aisle he reeled.

Jim and I just stood there, looking at each other. I could count the beads of sweat that were forming on his forehead. My throat was suddenly dry. Finally, Jim said to me in a whisper, "You felt it too, Roger?" I nodded, forcing myself to look back at the seat.

"Don't be alarmed," said Jim, his voice quite hearty. "I hope you'll soon grow accustomed to it."

"What?" I jumped. But looking at Jim, and his mouth hanging open, I thought I must be

going crazy. He was shaking his head slowly.

"No, you aren't going crazy," came a voice—and the voice was mine! But I hadn't said a word!

"I didn't say a single . . ." Jim began, but he couldn't go on.

"Of course you didn't. I said it." Jim's voice again! And his lips hadn't moved. But now we both turned to the back seat. The voices had come from there! "This is all very confusing," came Jim's voice from midair, "but it can be explained. Whenever I speak, unfortunately, it is in the voice that I last heard."

"Who are you?" I blurted at the air.

"A gentleman from Mars." My own voice answered.

That calm and simple statement took us a long time to comprehend.

"Why can't we see you?" I quavered finally, ready to accept anything.

"Please listen a moment. I arrived on your planet a short time ago, coming in a space ship from the Ganymede colony of Mars. I know nothing of your world, and I want to learn its ways, so I came to what appears to be your largest city. The strong gravity pull here fatigues me, and my few contacts with earthly people seems to, uh, perturb them somewhat. And since I want to see the city, what better way could I find

than seeing it from one of these busses?"

Well, there it was—the most completely stupefying, insanesituation imaginable: a man from Mars sitting invisible and composed in a sight-seeing bus on Broadway! All I could think of was, Lord, what an advertisement for the company! It is difficult to describe what I felt. One minute I was so exhilarated I wanted to shriek with laughter, the next was charged with such abject terror I could scarcely breathe. There was no denying the authenticity of the voices we heard. You had to be there, to have felt that thing in air, to have heard it speak.

"And now, if you like," came that voice from mid-air, "I would have one of you move this vehicle. The other can stay here with me."

Beside me, Jim eased his stony fascination with a long sigh. His head wagged slowly as if he were floating in a dream world. "All right, Roger," he said, "take it. As far as I'm concerned, we've got capacity."

So I took the bus to—of all places—Chinatown, wandering off course a dozen times. By the time I parked in the Bowery near the tiny winding streets of the oriental quarter, Jim came and sat down beside me. His iron tension had relaxed, and his customarily worried face wore a

charmed smile. "Like a story book and a science lecture rolled into one," he declared, breathlessly. "What a night!" Together we went to the rear.

Before I could say a word, the Martian spoke in Jim's voice. "Roger Davis, quiet your fears. I mean no harm to you." All I did was to clear my throat, but the Martian, continuing, spoke in *my* voice. It was like listening to an echo that had its own will. "In due time," he said, and I jumped, because I had been on the verge of asking him how he knew my thoughts. "You asked why you cannot see me. I am enclosed in an envelope of glass which has the property of curving light rays around whatever it contains. Your own civilization has succeeded in bending light . . ." The voice paused. "I see you are less the student of science than your friend is. You do not even wonder how I am able to see, when all light rays curve around me. But if you will look here, an inch above the arm rest, you will see two small black dots. They are apertures in my envelope; some light enters there."

I looked and saw the dots, and an involuntary shudder swept through me. It was a peephole into nothing from my side, but on the other side, this invisible alien being was regarding us. There was something uncanny and evil about it. "I understand,"

came the soft voice. "We Martians have seen the Universe. To us a new life form is not odious."

"How can you read my mind?" I blurted. "It—it scares me."

"I stumbled across this little faculty of mine quite by accident. It seems that earthlings, using nervous energy for any purpose, create a tiny electrical discharge. Fortunately, the discharges of your mind impinge on me as intelligent thoughts and words. Otherwise communication with you would have been a problem, for telepathy among Martians is unknown ... But I perceive you doubt my words. Why?"

I realized even at the time that the Martian's question was unnecessary. He was reading my mind and he knew. He knew that I was feeling as if something repellent was pawing me. It was as if something, far from reading my mind, was *absorbing* it. I didn't know why I doubted his words, why I felt a sudden chill pierce me, a deep foreboding for no coherent reason. But I knew that somehow this Martian knew my every thought, and even as I tried to reassure myself and think of something else, I knew that he knew that too, and that he knew that I knew that he knew—it was hopeless. I was playing poker with someone who knew every card I drew.

At that moment, we heard the drunk arguing with someone.

That someone proved to be Chuck Conners, the superintendent of the bus line. He stormed up the aisle. "You're fired, both of you!" he bellowed. "Where the hell do you come off to take out a wagon with one passenger in it, and that one a stew? I been standin' outside listenin' to you talkin' to yourselves, an' if you ain't drunk, you're crazy! Now get out!"

We walked out ahead of Conners with the drunk. As we stepped out of the bus, we heard Conners' voice inside, growling, "Get out of my way, you blubber-headed baboon." A second later, when Conners came tumbling out, a wild look in his eyes, we understood that it hadn't been Conners talking to himself, either.*

Chapter 2

Hosts to the Martian

That was the way it began. Ridiculous? Sure it was, but I am telling it to you just the way it happened. It seemed funny

*Following is a transcript of the Record of Employment. I copied it from the files of the Metropolitan Sight-Seeing Corporation. — (D.V.R.)
Davis, Roger. Reserve Driver. Employed 7/9/38.
Discharged 7/25/38. Reason: Intoxication and neglect of duty.

Hendrix, James J. Announcer. Employed 7/7/38.
Discharged 7/25/38. Reason: Intoxication and neglect of duty.

(Note: The Chuck Conners referred to is still in the employ of the M.S.S.C. He refused to make any statement regarding the events of the night of July 25, 1938. He admitted only that he remembered it well, for reasons of his own. — D.V.R.)

as hell when it started, funny and unbelievable and a whale of a good time. Maybe that was why I couldn't see what was happening to Jim Hendrix and me—but that was later. As I said, we were having a good time.

For instance, there was that incident you may have read about, the one that happened in the Paramount Theatre. Jim and I went there with the Martian, buying three tickets as a sort of private joke. That was the week they had the famous radio ventriloquist, making a public appearance. It wasn't difficult to arrange having the Martian throw back the ventriloquist's voice. It kept flitting out from everywhere, aisles, balconies—and though the audience enjoyed it tremendously, Jim and I got more of a kick out of it than anyone, because we knew the performer's consternation wasn't a fake. We just sat there and howled, watching the expression on the poor fellow's face. He declared the next day that he knew as much about it as the man in the moon. He was wrong by millions of miles, but he was warm at that.*

*From *Variety*, July 27, 1938.
Gift of Gab Goes Ga-Ga!

Yesterday's Paramount audience, three thousand weak with laughter, are scattered around New York today, swearing they saw America's ace one man dialoguer made to look like his dummy. Every time he tried to throw his voice a foot, somebody smashed it back to him from fifty yards away or further. They say that voice just materialized out of thin air. Sounds like hot air. A hearty huzzah for some smart press agent. What won't they think of doing with concealed loud-speaker systems next?—D.V.R.

In spite of the fun, and the intensely interesting discourses we held with the Martian, I was possessed by uneasiness. On the third or fourth night of the Martian's stay with us, for inevitably he came to our place, I lay awake in bed quietly, unable to sleep. Constantly the question kept recurring: why was he, if it was a he, here? And the answer that I had gotten when I had thought of asking came back . . . "all in due time . . ." I knew my every doubt was known, and it gave me a sort of fatalistic freedom to think what I liked. After a time, when sheer mental fatigue had lulled me, and I had almost fallen asleep, in the corner of our room I saw lights! They were tiny flashes, barely visible, but they kept flashing off and on for several moments, and emanating from more than one spot.

The sight snapped me awake, and before I could think better of it, I sat up in bed. From that instant the lights stopped. What had it been? In that corner of the room our Martian guest was supposedly quartered. A possible explanation struck me even as I realized that if I was right, I had lost all hope of proving it—merely by thinking about it. And there was no way to stop my mind. In desperation, I took a large dose of sleeping tablets, and even then it was some time before I found sleep.

In the morning I made up my mind. Doggedly, because I knew my plans were not private, I went ahead. While looking over the humorous accounts of the occurrence at the Paramount in the newspapers, I said to the Martian, "How is it that you are able to speak as we do?"

That was when I began to notice what was happening to Jim. He looked up from his coffee, flustered. We had spoken a good deal about and with the Martian, but somehow we had never thought of asking that simple question, nor others which stemmed from it. The obvious lapse was even more surprising to Jim. "Yes, that is a question," he said, wrinkling his brow the way he always did when he was puzzled. "From what we know of Ganymede, or even Mars, there isn't atmosphere enough to carry a sound wave. I seem to recall you said there is no telepathy among Martians. Yet you must have a means of communication, and sound appears to be out."

"I speak because I have adapted my body to form a larynx. I have no specialized organs as you know them." The answer came soft and low now as it continued. "As to how I communicate with other Martians, the answer is simple: by light rays."

I almost jumped out of my skin at the words. Jim didn't know what to make of my action, and

I waited. The Martian spoke on. "My 'voice' is composed of waves of light, most of them of a frequency too low to affect the human eye."

More and more! The Martian was saying just the things I needed to confirm a suspicion now painfully obvious. But proof was no longer possible. My plan was useless.

"The one of you known as Roger Davis," came the voice, "is at a loss. He wanted to get an instrument called a camera, and with it, to make photographs of my speech."

"What?" said Jim, incredulous. "Is that so, Roger?" I nodded. "But what for?"

"Because the Martian's voice of light rays, if it falls into the ultra-violet range, will photograph," I answered, "I know enough science to know that."

"But why?" said Jim.

"Let me answer that, please," came Jim's voice. "To you, Jim Hendrix, the question of my communicating is an academic one. But to Roger Davis, it appears to be vital. Last night, when I believed he was asleep, he saw my voice. Sometimes, as he correctly surmised, it does leave its ordinary range for a wavelength visible to humans as brief flashes."

"Yes," I said, determined to see it through, "and if that is so—"

"You are quite right," interrupted the Martian. "It means

that I am not alone. There are three Martians in this room."

This was Jim's time to jump. He lifted his six feet of spare frame out of his chair and sank back limply, his gaze traveling from me across the emptiness of the rest of the room. There was a peculiar lack of luster in his eyes then, as if he was sleepy. The voice continued. "It occurred to Roger Davis that he could not prove his contention, for since we knew it, we could merely refrain from communicating whenever he used this camera. That I have admitted the presence of three of us here is a compliment to you. We are convinced by now that there is no danger here for us."

"Danger?" I said.

"Yes," said the Martian, *but he answered using Jim's voice!* "We came to this planet not knowing what to expect. We might have found a race that would have destroyed us. Your world is old enough to have evolved a civilization much higher than its present one. At least six times has mankind started the upward climb; the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Chinese, Greek, Roman—all have perished, their brief hour futilely spent, achieving no permanence. But knowing nothing in advance, we hid our number in invisibility, so that if the one known were destroyed, two would remain to give our sig-

nal of failure. For that reason, also, we adopted the plan of answering in the same voice that addressed us, since it gave no clue of our number of whereabouts of the other two. You have noticed that I am using what you consider the wrong voice at present; I can use any I choose."

It was a moment before I spoke again. "Why do you stay with us now? Why not cast off this invisible guise and make yourselves known? We are two obscure and inconsequential people. Why don't you go to our statesmen, our scientists?"

"We find there is little to choose among you."

"But why are you here?" I asked, groping vainly for a clue. "You seem to have a purpose in coming here. And this signal of failure—"

"All in due time."

What an ominous ring those words had. In spite of every evidence of sincerity on the part of the Martians, a feeling of impending doom overwhelmed me, a tormenting foreboding I could not shake off. Was what I took to be sincerity, I thought, merely an evidence of the Martians' certainty that they could not now be hindered? Did they confirm my suspicions because they knew I could do nothing to alter their plans, whatever they were? Or could none alter them?

"You are quite right," said a

Martian calmly, in my voice.

Chapter 3

Amazing Developments

From that moment on, things began to move swiftly, and more important to me, from that day Jim Hendrix and I began to grow apart, in spite of everything I could do to heal the widening breach. Some of the things which I mention from here may be familiar to you from newspapers. But it is what you have not read, what you cannot, any more than the rest of the world, possibly imagine, that you will find here.

As I say, Jim and I started quarreling. Our first argument was over money. It had occurred to us that while we were having an experience which was magnificent and thrilling and incomparable, that at the same time, there was an embarrassing shortage of funds due to the loss of our jobs. Jim wouldn't touch my money and I had resolved to live on what I could earn while I was with him. This cruel, matter-of-fact thought, striking Jim out of the clouds where he had been for days, angered him.

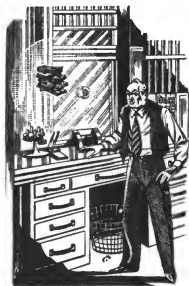
He paced the floor, his eyes burning with the old inner torture. "It isn't right," he kept repeating, over and over. He seemed to be in the throes of an emotional upheaval. But there was a subtle

difference in his attitude, and it was not lost on me. Where he had usually worried about himself, now he seemed to be dragging the whole world into it, the political system, economics, mankind.

In the midst of a long harangue, the door opened—and a pile of banknotes floated in through the air! Both of us gasped. "We trust that this is what you were so concerned about," came Jim's voice from mid-air.

"What is this?" Jim managed to say. We knew it was one of the Martians, but the money . . .

This, you see, is the explanation of the disappearance of five thousand dollars from the Exchange Bank of Fifth Avenue, and



the tellers who said that the money had just drifted away were not lying. The Martians had listened to Jim and gotten him the money—simply by going into a bank and taking it!*

"Jim, I said, when we knew the answer, "it's got to go back."

But Jim's face had a peculiar expression on it, something that was halfway between poorly concealed satisfaction and a slow, brooding cunning. He stood there, fingering the crisp bills and shaking his head. I knew what he was thinking; how simple it was for me to say the money had to go back. It didn't mean much to me. I hadn't had to fight the world for every penny I owned. There was a far away look on Jim, and it frightened me.

"No," he said. That was all. He wanted to keep the money.

We argued for a while, until my bitterness penetrated his trancelike state. Finally, with a touch of malice, he held the money out to me. "All right,"

he said. "Take the money back. What are you going to say?"

The argument went no further. Here was a situation with no solution. Even mailing the money back would have pointed the finger of guilt at the tellers. But the incident, despite the possible harm that might come to innocent men, was the least of my worries. More disquieting than the theft were the somber undertones that accompanied it. Jim Hendrix had glimpsed, as I had, the awful power that the Martians commanded. This was just a childish sample, an inadvertent, fumbling beginning.

For the next week, there was comparative peace between Jim and myself. At his insistence, we left our walk-up flat and moved into a luxurious apartment, and from there we made our trips about the city. Little by little we became intimate with the Martians. For the first time, we learned elementary things about them, things which as before, we had not thought of asking. I wondered about that, about the chances of the Martians being able not only to read minds, but to influence the way they thought.

What they told us, however, was unimportant. They ate prepared food pellets that they had brought with them; they breathed our atmosphere easily enough; they walked by means of pedicels

* (Excerpt from the New York Herald Tribune, August 4, 1938. Page 3.)

**BANK TELLERS HELD IN DISAPPEARANCE
OF \$5,000.00**

Three senior employees of the Exchange Bank of Fifth Avenue were taken into custody yesterday as the Police Dept. and State banking officials prepared to investigate the disappearance of \$5,000 in small notes, in the early hours of yesterday's business. Held in secret were the men's names, all of whom are reportedly men of excellent records and long experience. What puzzled the Police was the fact that all three declared that the money, lying in a pile, had "disappeared into thin air." They would not budge from that statement, after admitting the manifest absurdity of their story. Commissioner MacReady of the Twelfth Precinct — D.V.R.

that they formed from their viscous tissues that seemed to have no definite shape. At least, there was no way of knowing if they had a shape or not; they never discarded the envelopes that shrouded them. And they never mentioned the whereabouts of their space ship.

Yet often, as we took them about the city and the surrounding country, they compared our Earth with their own world. They had not expected to find such open and beautiful lands where nature's bounty yielded unasked. In all this, whenever they spoke of their own arid plains, their dark and barren world whose surface was inhospitable to any life, I often shuddered at what I imagined was the proprietary tone of their voices. It made me feel as if I was a real estate agent for another world.

But when I spoke of this to Jim, when I was alone with him, he would laugh. "Nonsense. Do you think they're planning on settling down here in their invisible pants, millions of miles from their own kind?" And then he snorted, adding, "It wouldn't be such a bad idea if one of them at least, did stay. Think what they could teach us."

"To what end?" I said. "I'm careful what I want to be taught."

Jim shrugged. "So is a savage when he meets a civilized person. He doesn't realize his own ignor-

ance, his inability to judge."

That was the way he spoke those days. There was no meeting of our minds. There seldom had been, with his dour outlook on life, but usually the fruits of our divergent opinions had been long discussions. Now Jim didn't argue any more. When I asked a question, he answered, and his manner indicated that he had grown impatient with discussion. Sometimes, listening to him, I wondered if it was really Jim Hendrix speaking. His lips would be moving, but the thoughts seemed alien... otherworldly...

Then came the day that we went to the slums. Going there had been Jim's idea. He addressed the Martians while apparently speaking to me. Almost from the first, I was startled by what he was saying. "Here, in utter squalor and misery, a million beings called human manage to exist. These hovels are their homes, and in them breed enough disease germs to ravage a continent. The government has tried to wipe them out and set up new houses, but a government is slow, and the owners of the property jealously guard it, waiting for a chance to profiteer on human suffering." He went on like that, and then in the heart of that miserable district, he paused and delivered an eloquent, scorchingly bitter speech.

Suddenly I felt a numbing cold

seize me, and my breath almost froze in my throat. In front of me, a muddy puddle of water became ice at my feet while I watched. Then, from beside me somewhere, a small streak of flame hissed out, thin as a pencil, and it played directly on the houses before which we stood. Instantly, a mass of flames roared into life. The cold stopped and an inferno of crackling, leaping fire began to devour the old houses.

Moments later, safe at a corner where we had fled, Jim and I watched the fire engines pouring into the district. I remember catching Jim's eye, and seeing there the glance of comprehension. In my utter confusion, it wasn't until later that it struck me, more violently than any physical blow. On all sides there was panic. Whole blocks were going up in flames. No one knew how many people were trapped in those houses. I saw men and women hurling themselves from the smoke and fire, clutching children, dying on the pavements. It was a scene of indescribable anguish, each horrible moment more sickening than the one before. There was death on every hand, innocent death of infants and mothers and fathers and invalids. The hand of Death had risen to smash hundreds. It seemed as if the world was filled with the great wailing that rose

up, as if the soul of that wretched gutted neighborhood had, in dying, groaned an immense, unutterable, unforgettable groan.*

We were home when I pounded the truth out of Jim. For more terrible than all of it, I felt that Jim knew. He was as sick as I, but there was that look about him again. I grabbed him and pulled him close to me. "Tell me what you know about this!" I shouted feeling every nerve in me tense to the breaking point, my head spinning dizzily.

"The Martians did it," he gasped.

I smashed him across the face. "You knew!" I screamed. "You knew!" Jim was my best friend, but in my fury I might have killed him then. I held his throat in my hands—and then it was as if my strength had been sucked from me, and a great weakness overcame me. I fell to the floor, crying like a baby.

After a time, when I had calmed, I heard the whole story. There was a fiendish twist to it, for the explanation came from a Martian in Jim's voice. "... the evil had to be removed. What I did was to draw together all the heat in the atmosphere, con-

*Roger Davis evidently refers here to the Cherry Street fire, where more than four hundred perished. Almost three square blocks were completely burned on that black Friday of August 12, 1938. The files of any American newspaper carry the details. The newsreels and radio reported it extensively, and a New York paper started a relief fund for the victims. The investigation which followed at the time proved nothing.—D.V.R.

centrate it, and discharge it at once . . ."

I heard little else of the story. They had drawn the heat out of the air! Was this so very different from the thoughts they drew from human minds, from the strength I had felt leave me a short while before—from the change in Jim where his whole being was seemingly being drawn from him. "This little faculty of mine . . ." the Martian had said, speaking of his ability to read minds. They were like sponges, inconceivably powerful sponges, *absorbing* what they wanted!

I remembered how I had felt the first time we met them. And in their own words, they had no organs, no shape; they formed them. They had known of our past civilizations, though we were the first humans they had encountered, and we had said not a word about it. They had known simply by pulling it out of my mind, because there was nothing I knew, let alone consciously thought, which they could not get. And so they had gotten Jim, knowing that in that poor distraught boy there was fertile ground for their work. Jim was theirs; they had been certain he understood the fires even before he had known.

Slowly I realized that Jim himself was now speaking to me, his face pale and bloodless. "You're taking it too hard. Why don't you

look at it from a broad view? It was a hellhole, and the people who lived there were lost. Their deaths were merciful releases from horrible lives. Where they died, a new world will spring up . . ."

"Couldn't you wait until you had that new world to give them?" I said dully. "Did you have to kill them first?"

He started answering me before he caught the import of my words. "One can't build on a rotten foundation," he began, and then, halting, he added, "but I didn't do it. I didn't kill anyone." He was troubled at the thought, and he looked to the empty air beside him as if for help.

"You agree with it," I said, hopelessly. "Your words were an invitation to destruction."

"Yes," came Jim's voice. Jim wasn't speaking. "His approach was direct. It is the only answer."

"But we are human!" I cried. "I don't expect you to understand that, with your mind of a—a—"

"A sponge?" came the taunting answer from mid-air.

"A sponge!" I hurled. "A damnable sponge from another world! We know our world and its problems. What does this mass murder do? There is suffering enough. . ."

"There will be an end to suffering soon." It was Jim himself who spoke now. Feverishly I thought how little difference it made whether he spoke or was

spoken for. "There has been muddling enough. If man is still a child, he must be taught. And he will be taught!" Jim rose as he spoke. The color had come back to him, there was something strong and resolute about him. He had no more misgivings about his own part in the tragedy. There was no more wavering in him. He seemed to be in a terrible state somewhere between sleep and waking, and his eyes were on an unseen horizon.

"You're mad!" I shouted, lunging for him.

Halfway toward him, I fell to the floor. Something had taken the power out of my legs. I was helpless. It seemed as if an eternity passed while I lay there, listening to voices debate over my life, and all the voices were Jim's. Then I heard, "No, he is my friend," and realizing that Jim had said it, and with those words saved my life, I wanted to die. Then, bit by bit, the world receded and I floated down into the black vault of a bottomless abyss.

Chapter 4 Martian Misdeeds

It was toward evening when I regained consciousness. I was alone. Weakly I rose to my feet and stumbled to the table. A strange headline on a newspaper there gripped my attention. **COUNCILMAN VELDON DIES**

ON FLOOR OF CHAMBER LEADING REVOLT AGAINST CHAIRMAN. I looked to the date-line, unbelieving. A week had passed! Impossible!*

Quickly I glanced through the story. Councilman Veldon had been struck down by heart disease while fighting against the Chairman of the Council, who for some reason of his own had tried to disband the session of the Council, which had run extraordinarily long in a fierce taxation fight. The Chairman, Myron Clark, was quoted as denying having said any of the things attributed to him—in spite of the undeniable evidence of a packed Chamber gallery.**

*Note: Roger Davis here quotes almost verbatim the headline on the New York Times for August 19, 1938.—D.V.R.

**Following are several excerpts which I culled from leading New York newspapers, all commenting on the event which Roger Davis explains in the body of his ms.

From the New York World-Telegram, August 21, 1938.

"... not only was I present throughout the session until Mr. Veldon's tragic death ended it, but I remained to speak with Chairman Clark afterward. I, among hundreds of others, distinctly heard Mr. Clark denounce the Council, call it a pack of fools, and then announce that the session was ended. That started the fight, which Mr. Veldon led. The issue of the tax, which precipitated the fight, is not important any longer. What is important is that a major official of the City of New York attempted to run roughshod over his opposition in a dictatorial manner. Most astonishing, and probably the death blow to Myron Clark's political ambitions, is the fact that he immediately denied having said any of the words attributed to him. He denied it with such vehemence as to prove a testimonial to his histrionic abilities ...

From The New York Times, August 22, 1938.
"... absurd for him to deny saying the things hundreds heard ..."

From an editorial in the New York Post, August 20, 1938. "... Clark's denials are the ravings of a lunatic. Only a lunatic would have tried ending the session in the first place ..."

Do you remember that? Of course you do. But did it strike you that there was a deadly parallel between this headline story and a humorous account of a ventriloquist who had also denied saying things attributed to him, an account published a few weeks previous? Was this ghastly similarity an accident? But what could one make of a Chairman denying the statements that so many had heard him make?

I heard the door of the apartment open, and turning, I saw Jim come in. His face was serious as he sat down on the other side of the table. There was something hurried about him. He was obviously a man with many things on his mind, and pressed for time. It was an effort for him to compose himself sufficiently to sit quietly while he spoke to me.

"I see you've guessed," he said, pointing to the newspaper. "You've been unconscious more than a week. That was five days ago." He turned his eyes away from me as he continued. "Next time I will be unable to save you. They want you out of the way."

"Out of the way—for what?" I whispered.

Jim rose and began to pace the floor, his words coming slowly, and then sometimes pouring from him. "Roger, the Martians are emissaries from their world. In a sense, they aren't even Martians. Eons ago, they were forced to

leave Mars when the planet grew cold and lifeless. There was no planet near them with life enough to offer a haven for all, save ours, and they feared us because we were an older world, and as they thought, advanced enough to annihilate them. So they scattered about the universe in colonies. Always through the ages, wherever they were, whether deep under the icy fastness of Ganymede where these three are from or on the surface of the mighty seas of Uranus, they dreamed of the time when the Martians would be a united race again. Like most dreams, it seemed destined never to be realized.

"And then, from these dreamers rose three courageous souls, willing to risk their lives scouring the universe for a new place. They came here to determine once and for all whether it was possible for the Martian race to unite on our planet. So they came, as they said, fearfully. They found here an atmosphere they can breathe by thinning it a bit, the food they require, and in addition, vast elemental resources. And no danger."

He paused there and looked at me carefully. "I don't know how this will hit you, Roger," he said, "but the truth of the matter is that they have decided to come here. They intend to send for the others, perhaps five hundred million of them. They're

going to do things for us, make our world over, eliminate the weaklings, the unfit . . ."

"No," I said, in a stupor, "no, no." I couldn't understand what he was telling me. I sat there pounding the table with my fist, hammering the newspaper, trying to comprehend his insane words. This was August, 1938. The country was harvesting crops, getting ready for a football season, preparing to vote for new Congressmen soon. What was this talk of Martians coming from space to take over our world? I realized then that I had been talking out loud, for Jim answered me.

"They're going to take it over, as you put it," he said. "They'll make a great people of us." There was a fierce light in his eyes as he spoke, pointing to the newspaper. "This was a mistake. I warned them against it."

"So they killed Councilman Veldon?"

"The city had been standing on its head through these stormy sessions. One of the Martians, using the Chairman's voice, tried to end the bickering and disband the Council. A revolt broke out. They thought killing the leader would end it. It didn't."

"Of course it didn't! Did they think they'd find submission?"

"There will have to be submission sooner or later," said Jim, gravely. "The Martians can

do what they like with us. But if we submit, they'll make us great. And you and I, Roger, we'll be mighty and rich and honored!"

"Puppet dictators of the real dictators! Great, perhaps, in our treachery, rich in the power bought with our people's blood, and honored by no one, not by thieves or murderers or traitors who would be noblemen by comparison."

"You're wrong," Jim said firmly. "What do I care for the lives of those unfit to live? History will be my judge!"

"And if history proves you wrong?"

"It won't." There was finality in his words. "Three Martians are not enough to do what we plan. We want to avoid these half-measures. They're going out to bring others and I'm going with them. Make your choice. Do you want to come? You can't remain behind . . . and live."

"Jim," I said, "can't you see what you're helping them to do? This world of ours is far from perfect, but it's ours to improve as we want, as we can. It never has been easy. Mankind progresses slowly, slips back, but goes on again. And he can go on, if only he has his liberty. No tyrant has ever been able to take away liberty for long. But these Martians, aliens, unable to understand humans and human frailty, what do we mean

to them? They can't feel emotion or compassion. If they come, the world will have as its master a tyrant it can never overcome, a race whose power—"

"Power!" Jim echoed. "Power!" That word alone had found a responsive chord in him. Standing there, looking at me, he was a man apart from all mankind. The world that had misused him, as he had often claimed, had through an unbelievable arrangement of circumstances, bred in him a monster to destroy it. Jim Hendrix, my best friend, had been warped, pitifully mis-shapen into this semblance of a human being who would trade a world for his own gain. There was no conscience left in him. He knew so little of it that he sought to appease mine by babbling about bettering the world, while for him, only the lust for might remained.

"Do you want to come with me?" Jim had grown impatient. "You know the alternative."

"My death."

"Yes." There was scarcely any regret in his voice as he faced me vibrant and strong. I looked about me, and if I had found a weapon, I would have attacked him again before the Martians could stop me. But I didn't know where they were. "You needn't be afraid to speak," said Jim, mistaking the reason for my looking around. "We're alone." Then, as I rose quickly and stepped toward him,

he pulled out a revolver. "Alone except for this," he said, waving the blunt end of the gun at me. "For the last time. With me or against me?"

There was only one answer. My death, little as it meant to me, would accomplish nothing. I had to play for time, to go along and pray that somewhere my chance would come. The Martians had been afraid of danger; they were not invulnerable. I nodded my resignation.

"Good," said Jim. He smiled at me grimly. "I have a deep affection for you," he added, "in spite of the fact that you're playing for time."

His divining words so startled me that I jumped, and Jim's laugh filled the room. Was he too able to read my mind? But no, it must have been an evident game I was playing, even to a madman. For he was mad; we would have had a learned name for him in college . . . and wildly, a possible solution flashed across my mind. Somewhere, somehow, I would have this last chance. But I needed time—a few hours.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Out into space for three days to give a signal."

"Into space? But how?"

"A space ship. How else?" Jim replied sarcastically.

A space ship. It was a story. It wasn't real. "Where is it?" I heard myself asking from the

depths of that unreal world.

Jim Hendrix laughed. "Why?"

"I must have a few hours to myself," I said. "I want to put my estate in order. Something may go wrong." I held my breath. If Jim could read my thoughts, or if there was a Martian present somewhere —

He laughed again. "Nothing will go wrong. But you can settle that precious estate of your. Meet me at midnight at Grand Central." He stepped toward the door, then held back. "I hope you appreciate the fact that any mention of this will land you securely in an observation ward. And we won't have any trouble finding you when we return." He was still laughing when he left.

Chapter 5 A Signal in Space

Professor Worth looked at me peculiarly, fingering his white moustache. "I don't think I understand you, Davis," he said, perplexed. "Is this a practical joke?"

"Did you ever know me to joke when I was a student in your classes? There isn't time to explain," I answered wearily. "It took me so long to find you, even knowing that you were to be at the hospital for the summer recess. You've got to believe me. I'm in dead earnest. If the money isn't—"

"No, no," he interjected, hastily. "You think money will do everything. It isn't the money at all." He furrowed his great brow and his deep black eyes were troubled. "You say that I've got to follow these instructions of yours implicitly?"

"Word for word as I've written them here. One slip . . ." I grinned wryly. "More than you know depends on this."

"I'll do it." Professor Worth pressed a desk button.

"Don't forget," I said. "When it's over, you're to follow me to Grand Central and go where I go. From then on . . ."

"I wish you'd finish your sentences," said Worth, with a shrug. "You make it sound so dramatic. Too damned dramatic." His assistant entered. I forced a laugh and sat back.

I remember of what followed only that I found myself in a cab entering the Terminal when it was almost midnight. Jim was waiting for me. As we went through the gates, I noticed that he gave the station conductor three tickets for the two of us. Only too well did I realize why he laughed at the conductor's question; there was a Martian with us, and Jim was continuing the little joke we had started weeks before. I remember that I had a slight negative reaction, knowing there was a Martian with us, and then it passed.

On the train, Jim said to me, "I see you've come around a bit since we parted."

Sincerely, I answered, "It isn't easy, but I'm beginning to agree."

Jim smiled. "Our friend here says you're telling the truth. I'd advise you to continue."

At that moment, I saw Professor Worth come striding down the train. He nodded icily to Jim and me, and continued on.

"Did you see who that was?" Jim exclaimed. "Old man Worth. And didn't he appear cordial!"

"Maybe he's in some kind of trouble," I ventured. "He was supposed to be at Bellevue all summer, and here he is, heading north."

And so passed the two most critical moments of the weeks that had gone by—but I didn't know it! Every word I said was the truth. I spoke to Jim honestly, and the Martian was not wrong when he told Jim so. When Professor Worth appeared, I was as surprised as Jim, and as unable to explain his stand-offish attitude.

From then on we rode in comparative silence. Hours later, we got off the train at a little station in Hayman's Corners, Vermont. Soon Jim hired a car and we set off.

On the densely wooded northern shore of Lake Towanda, several miles from town, Jim stopped the car, obviously under

the directions which I could not hear, as I had not heard previous things the Martian had said to Jim. We got out of the car and began to make our way into the woods. In another few minutes we came on a clearing.

To one side of the clearing, well hidden under piles of shrubs and branches, was a ship. There is no other word for it. It was perhaps forty feet long and it tapered at both ends from a maximum height and width of twenty feet. That was all it was, a fat cigar made of a pale green metal that reflected hardly any light from the brilliant moon above.

"Welcome," my own voice called out from the clearing. "We see that the reluctant one has finally decided in his own favor." It may seem odd to you when I say that I was glad to hear those other Martians, and glad to see the ship. But it is the truth.

In what seemed to be the unbroken continuity of the ship's side, a small, triangular door opened, and falling, it formed a sort of gangplank. It was my first clue to the size of the Martians; they couldn't have been very large and used that small door with comfort. From the interior of the ship, a pleasantly diffused light streamed out into the already graying night. Stepping over the branches, eagerly I entered the ship.

The whole interior was a con-

fusing arrangement of machinery. There seemed hardly an inch unoccupied by wheels, levers, lights that gave off a luminescent glow, dials, meters, tubes. Jim echoed my own burst of admiration and amazement. Little as I understood it, it was plainly the work of engineers with a staggering amount of ability—if it was real. I always had to remind myself it was real; there was Jim and I, and voices which were ours and weren't ours, and a ship that might have been a dream.

"It isn't as complicated as it looks," said one of the Martians. "If one pressed down the blue lever on your right, and then in quick succession that whole board of keys, the ship would of itself tilt upward and then rise. It would go perhaps a million miles into space on that operation alone. We had planned to have everything ready in case of failure, and the quest would have been abandoned."

"And what was that signal?" Although the voice was the same, I saw that Jim had spoken.

"Once in space, we need all three to operate the ship," came the answer. "But one would be enough to throw in this large switch here. This one is green, and the natural color of the ship would have blazed like a miniature star in space, signaling our failure. But the one we will use tomorrow night, when we are

scheduled to leave, is this red one beside it. Red for success, red to call other Martians. But I see that Mr. Davis pays us the compliment of marveling at our engineering."

And marveling I was, at their ingenuity, in spite of the fact that Jim, his body trembling at the thought, said to me, "All this you would have lost for a nebulous thing called freedom, for millions unfit for it. This is the way emperors dreamed of living!"

"Now," I heard my voice say, "you earthlings must leave. There remains work for us here. Outside you can make your beds and sleep, if your bodies require it."

At mention of the word sleep, something in me stirred, and I felt for the first time a heavy fatigue sweep over me. "I'd like to go back to town," I said wearily. "I'm much too tired to sleep out in the open. I'll take the car and stay at the hotel."

There was silence for a moment, as the Martians evidently probed my mind. "Quite so," came the words, at length. "Return early."

With the voice of a Martian guiding, I started back to the car. In the morning light I saw that an immense swath had been cut through the thick woods, leading to the clearing. That was where the ship had come, leaving a trail. It must have come down in the dead of night, and making no noise, to have remained un-

molested even in the mountains.

The sun beat down warmly when I drove into town. For some reason, I inquired for the most expensive hotel in town. The man who answered me laughed. "Ain't but one," he said, "an' that's no hotel. I guess you'll have to go to Constable Jefferies' place right over there."

Constable Harry Jefferies proved to be a gaunt, kindly New Englander. With pleasant ceremoniousness, he asked me to sign an old register. It was fortunate he did so, for there on the page stood the name Harrison Worth. Immediately, remembrance flooded my brain, and hurriedly I found Professor Worth's room and went in.

I saw at once he hadn't slept a wink. "Davis, what is this—"

I cut him off. "Did your assistant drive my car up here?" I asked.

"I phoned New York the minute I sneaked off the train. Your car will be here in several hours." I breathed easier. Worth regarded me speculatively. "I've half a mind to go to the police," he said. "My assistant phoned me back an hour ago. One of the cases in your car opened. He says it's full of carefully packed dynamite."

"True." I returned his gaze.

"I know it's true," said the old man in a voice of steel. "You

don't have to say so as if you were revealing something. And if you're being honest, tell me what this is all about."

There was no way out of it. The old Professor was looking at me in silence, worried, sleepless. He had gone to great trouble to help me. But how could I begin? "Professor Worth," I said, "I'll tell you. But promise me one thing: whether you believe me or not, you'll continue helping me."

"I'll give no such promise," he said slowly. "But tell me, and perhaps I'll do it in spite of disbelieving you."

So I told him, as briefly as I could, and when I had finished, he rose and walked to the window. The warm summer sun came slanting through to play on the wrinkles engraved on his face.

"If you are lying," he said, after a time, "I have just heard the most complex and magnificent lie of all time."

"Don't you see?" I said. "That was why I asked you to hypnotize me, to submerge my feelings and make me believe the things I wrote down for you. I had to take that chance."

"These . . . these Martians of yours, who absorb minds—why couldn't they go deep enough to reach the things I buried in your subconscious?"

"I don't know," I said simply. "I gambled. I remembered that I had first seen them speak to

each other when I was half asleep. Evidently there were states of mind which did not bring on a reaction in them. So I was willing to take a gamble. If they could read only the surface, the conscious mind, I was safe. If not, I just wouldn't have been here now."

"But what a delicate and ingenious chain," the Professor muttered to himself. "It might have miscarried at any point. First, I made you lose your objections to their plan; then I had you believe in another. Third, I had you forget ever having seen me at the hospital. Fourth, all thought of a violent plan of your own was removed from your mind. Fifth, I gave you two post-hypnotic suggestions: one, at the mention of the word sleep, you were to seek out the most expensive hotel in town; the other, when you saw my name on the register, all this was to return to your mind . . ." He was speaking to himself. "Dear Lord," I heard him say, "let him be lying. Let this be a joke played on a gullible old man . . ."

I went to him and took his arm. His aged eyes pierced me, and then he gripped my hand. "What if they followed you?" he asked.

"We wouldn't be alive now. They never doubted what they read in my mind." But despite myself, I turned slowly and surveyed the room, half expecting at

any moment to hear my own voice materializing from nowhere.

I turned back to the Professor. "What next?" he said, quietly. "Where did you get the dynamite, and for what?"

"I got it figured out," I said. "Remember you said yesterday that I believed money could do everything. I'm going to attach a concussion cap, load it in my pockets and go back there a living bomb. And you're going to set me off."

"How?" the old man whispered.

"First you'll make me forget all this. Second, you'll tell me I have no pockets, and I won't have them—until I need them. When I hear the words that express their readiness to leave, let me immediately take the dynamite out of my pockets and throw it."

"But it means your death."

"Perhaps."

"And what of your friend Jim Hendrix? Is he too, to die?"

"No." I hadn't thought of that. I was ready to die because it was the only answer. But Jim had to leave here alive. In time this would be but a feeble memory to him, half believed. He would recover and forget. He had to live. "Let me first send him to the car on the road," I said. "He'll be safe there."

The old man nodded. "Soon my assistant will be here with your car," he said. Then he mo-

tioned me to the table, and we had breakfast brought up, all the while speaking to each other as if we hadn't a care in the world.

It was late in the afternoon when I left town, remembering only that I had slept for several hours, resting uneventfully in a little hotel. As I drove through the calm countryside with its little houses perched near the road, waving back at people, I had no misgivings about the momentous journey upon which I was soon to embark. I believed I was going, that I was in agreement with Jim at last.

Soon I came to a bend in the road that seemed familiar and I stopped the car. A moment later, Jim came crashing through the underbrush that lined the road.

"You're late," he said, guiding me back. His face was glistening with perspiration, and he hardly glanced at me. There were too many things on his mind. Already, I could see, he was living years ahead, envisioning the things that were to come after this incredible day.

The Martian ship lay where it had been the night before. Its pale sheen glittered in the sun, mingling its green with gold. There was no sign of life around it, save for Jim and myself, the clearing was deserted and silent. Lackadaisically, I sat down under a tree. Then, near my feet, I saw the grass pressed down, and

Jim turning to one side as if he were listening to someone.

"I can't understand you at all," he turned back to me, a pleased smile on his face. "The way you carried on at the beginning, and now look at you. I'm trembling with anticipation, excitement, call it what you like—and you're just sitting there. And it isn't just an act," he added grimly. "I know that."

"You're in pretty thick with our Martian friends," I said.

He nodded and a flush mounted his face. "This is only the beginning, the very beginning," he said, looking past me as if I weren't there. "You don't know anything of the plans we made during the time you were unconscious back in New York. We traveled around then . . ." His voice died away and he had to clench his fists to control himself. I smiled, understanding the way he felt. We sat together quietly, saying nothing.

Some time later, the triangular door in the space ship opened, and as if it had been a signal, Jim went into the woods and came out with a large paper box. "Food," he announced. "I had to go down the road to a house and buy it. Funny, isn't it, the way it slipped my mind that we'd have to eat?" I helped him gather dry brush for a fire. Then, fumbling through his trousers,

Jim called, "Got a match?"

For a split instant I stood there looking at him blankly. Now as I recall the moment, I realize how near the end I was. But at the time, all I did was stare at Jim. I couldn't look for a match—because I didn't remember having any pockets!

"Well look, will you?" said Jim, regarding me. Then, suddenly I chilled and a brittle, frosted leaf floated down from the tree overhead. A little streak of flame burst from the air near the pile of brush, and the fire was started! Startled for an instant, Jim began to laugh the next minute, understanding that the Martian had performed the slight menial task for him. "Matchless would be a better word for it." And I laughed with him.

We were halfway through the meal when Jim, in the midst of our rather jolly conversation, happened to say, "Well, in a few hours it'll be night. We're almost ready to start."

For a reason I didn't understand at the time, my mind was all at once in utter confusion. My hands shot into my jacket pockets and stayed there, then slowly withdrew. What had happened, as I now see it, was that Jim had expressed the thought that was supposed to start me—but he had qualified it with an *almost*! I was neither here nor there!

"What's the matter?" said Jim.

"You almost choked on your food."

"There's . . . something for you . . . in the car," I replied, lamely, beginning to react. "A letter for you . . ."

"Letter? Here?"

"It came in the city. I—I forgot to tell you."

"Where in the car is it?" said Jim, wondering what it was all about.

"On the seat."

"On the seat?" he echoed.

It was utter nonsense, you see. What I was saying didn't make sense, and I knew it as I said it, but I had to say something, anything that would get Jim away. For, from the moment he had mentioned starting, he had begun a cycle which would be completed in a few moments.

Perplexed, Jim started for the car. At that precise instant, from near the space ship his own voice called to him. "Don't be gone for any length of time. We are ready to leave."

And in the same instant, having heard the key words again, with Jim out of the way, I jumped to my feet, plunged my hands in my pockets and hurled the dynamite! All I remember of that horrible second is Jim's face staring at me as my arm swung down. He had turned back as the voice called, and started back a step or two—and he was almost directly in line with my aim!

The ground trembled at my feet, huge columns of dust and smoke rose, and an immense oak came tumbling down. That is my last recollection of the scene: the topmost branches of the oak spinning toward me, and my falling in their midst.

My eyes opened on twilight. Not far away a fire was burning in the brush and licking against the trunk of the fallen oak. Then I became aware of a hand near me, and moving to one side, I saw Jim lying there. His face was covered with blood—blood that was slowly seeping from his chest. He had been torn apart by the blast. As I struggled to rise, I saw that I was no longer under the oak that had fallen on me. Someone had taken me out of the path of the fire.

I bent over Jim. He was dying. What little breath there was left in him came fitfully, and his face was contorted in pain. "Jim!" I cried, suddenly remembering everything. "You were at the car!"

Feebly, his head rolled to one side and he grimaced. The words would not come. Then suddenly I heard his voice quite plainly, but looking at him, I knew it was the voice of a Martian!

"Your plan miscarried, admirable as it was."

"You live?" I cried.

"For a few moments more, per-

haps. You were fortunate. All three of us were together."

"Fortunate!" I said bitterly, looking down at Jim.

"More than you know. We absorbed most of the shock, but it was enough to kill us. As for Jim Hendrix, had he survived, his life would have been worthless, as yours is now. In dying, while he fought for breath, he struggled to pull you clear of the fire. We never understood the relationship you call friendship, but now we know that to an earthling it is an admirable weakness. It is too bad it was wasted."

The words were coming more slowly, and they were calm, studied.

"It wasn't wasted," I answered. "You're gone, dead!"

"Death means nothing. Had we lived, we would have taken part in the remaking of your world. For us to die in the cause of the Martian nation is enough. You could not understand our plans. Even now you are thinking we were brutal, emotionless. No matter. Your world will be remade by others of our nation."

There was no rancor, no hatred in that voice. It came from the air, from a being I had never seen, like a brooding wind, filled only with a deep contempt. In their own way, these Martians had been creatures of lofty intellect. There was no revenge in them.

"No revenge," agreed the voice. "I am the last of the three, and I can kill you where you stand, even as I am disintegrating like the two who went before me. You must live to regret, and regret one day you will, when you see our miracles. For one thing you did not know. Our vessel stands here undamaged, but I am too weak to reach it. But we foresaw the possibility of our being unable to take it back into space. A bad landing would have disabled us even though there was safety here. When another of your earth days passes without any signal from us, a second expedition will take flight. Mars is not without its pioneers."

Jim was stirring, his lips parted. His hand lifted weakly on mine. His eyes opened for the last time, clear and shining. "Sorry," he whispered. His hand fell from mine, clutching at the earth he had been so ready to betray, and under which he would be buried. I wept like a child. A greater price than I had been willing to pay had been taken from me and I had failed.

I sat there until darkness came on, and then wearily I rose. "Are you alive?" I called out.

There was no answer. Jim's voice had been his own at the last. Somewhere nearby the Martian who had spoken to me had joined his fellows, disintegrating himself, leaving no vestige on this

alien world . . .

It wasn't until I was driving back to this little Vermont village, numb with despair, that I thought of it. Out of my daze and disinterestedness in life, came that thought which had kept me going before. There were others.

When I got back to the hotel, Constable Jefferies asked me a lot of questions. The blast of the dynamite had been heard for miles, and a party would set out in the morning. My clothes were torn, my hands and face cut and bleeding. I put him off. Professor Worth had left in the afternoon. I went up to this room of mine and began to write this account.

It is almost dawn now; I heard a rooster crow. The moon is already paling in the sky. These hours the thought has taken form.

There is only one thing to do. The Martian ship lies intact, ready to start its voyage to the heavens at a touch. I remember the directions. I am going back to the woods. There I will bury Jim. And then I will take the ship aloft, to give the signal of failure.

(NOTE: *I have included here, at the end of the ms, the rest of the corroborating notes. They follow. D.V.R.*)

From the *Hayman's Corners Free Press*, August 27, 1938.

MYSTERY BLAST EXCITES COUNTY

Fresh Grave Found at Site
Police Hunt Roger Davis

Shortly before nine o'clock yesterday evening, a severe explosion on the north shore of Lake Towanda, in the woods owned by Amy Cargill, shook the countryside and was heard for miles. This morning, Constable Jeffries, leading a party, located the site of the blast. Over a hundred trees had been felled there. They looked more as if a hammer had knocked them over, a pretty big hammer to be sure, than an explosion caused by dynamite, as the Constable says. The ground around one portion of a clearing looked scorched, but there weren't any signs of a large fire.

To add to the mystery, a freshly dug grave was found on the spot. In it was the body of a man believed to have been James J. Hendrix, a college student. He had been seen in town by Tom Ellery, who hired out a car to him. The car was found in the road nearby. Also, Mrs. Stevens, who lives nearby, claimed to have sold the dead man some groceries during the day, but nobody believes Mrs. Stevens since she identified the governor's son as a bank robber two years ago.

Constable Jeffries declared that the hunt was on for another student named Roger Davis. This Davis spent the night under the Constable's nose, but the Constable doesn't believe in disturbing guests. He still has the autograph of the suspected killer in his register, as well as another name about which he is keeping mum. He is not saying a word about a large blue roadster parked in his stable. Said roadster was driven up yesterday by another mystery man, and it is supposed to be full of dynamite. Mean-

while the investigation goes on merrily, while the Constable wonders if it is legal to fill out the death certificate for James J. Hendrix.

From the *New Haven Courier*, August 30, 1938.

Professor Harrison Worth was visited today by Constable Harry Jeffries of Hayman's Corners, Vermont, in the Constable's effort to secure additional information about two of the Professor's former students who figured as principals in a murder mystery in the Constable's precincts. By a coincidence, the Professor was present at the same hotel where the suspected murderer, Roger Davis, spent the night. The murdered man was identified as James J. Hendrix, a friend of the man believed to have caused his death.

After emerging from Professor Worth's home, Constable Jeffries made the following statement: "I believe that both Davis and Hendrix came to Hayman's Corners knowing that Professor Worth was to be there. We can only guess at their reasons, but both boys were known to have been addicted to violent arguments, often staying up all night quarreling while at college. When Davis failed to interest the Professor in whatever he had come for, a friend of Davis brought his car, filled with dynamite. Then Davis returned to kill Hendrix. As Professor Worth refused to divulge the conversation he held with Davis, I realize that the conjectures must remain just that. We have nothing to go in in determining the immediate motive of the murder, but the hunt will go on and the killer brought to justice."

From *The New York Times*, August 28, 1938.

Astronomers from several sections of the country reported that

a peculiar brilliance manifested itself in the heavens early yesterday morning. The radiance, believed to have been several million miles from earth, lasted too long to be a comet, and was of an unusual deep green in color. It was seen for an hour.

ms ends. I will add only that it had lain waiting for my return from Europe for several months. In all that time, not a sign, not a vestige has appeared of Roger Davis. It is as if he had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Where is Roger Davis?

Here my presentation of this

The End

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Illustrated By
Rod Ruth

ALMOST HUMAN

TARLETON FISKE

When Robert Bloch (author of Psycho) did the following yarn—under the name of Tarleton Fiske—he deliberately set himself the task of avoiding the plot clichés traditionally associated with the robot theme in science fiction. The result—one of his own personal favorites, by the way—is a robot story without the usual electronic window dressing or the bloody rebellion that sweeps Mankind away in a single night. Instead, Bloch limits himself to a narrower, more effective focus, to a single robot and three Homo sapiens who teach him everything he needs to know, except—and the omission proves fatal—what a woman really means when she analyzes human love.

WHAT do you want?" whispered Professor Blasserman.

The tall man in the black slicker grinned. He thrust a foot into the half-opened doorway.

"I've come to see Junior," he said.

"Junior? But there must be some mistake. There are no children in this house. I am Professor Blasserman. I —"

"Cut the stalling," said the tall man. He slid one hand into his raincoat pocket and levelled the ugly muzzle of a pistol at Professor Blasserman's pudgy waistline.

"Let's go see Junior," said the tall man, patiently.

"Who are you? What do you mean by threatening me?"

The pistol never wavered as it dug into Professor Blasserman's stomach until the cold, round muzzle rested against his bare flesh.

"Take me to Junior," insisted the tall man. "I got nervous fingers, get me? And one of them's holding the trigger."

"You wouldn't dare!" gasped Professor Blasserman.

"I take lots of dares," murmured the tall man. "Better get moving, Professor."

Professor Blasserman shrugged hopelessly and started back down the hallway. The man in the black slicker moved behind him. Now the pistol pressed against the Professor's spine as he urged the

fat little man's body forward.

"Here we are."

The old man halted before an elaborately carved door. He stooped and inserted a key in the lock. The door opened, revealing another corridor.

"This way, please."

They walked along the corridor. It was dark, but the Professor never faltered in his even stride. And the pistol kept pace with him, pressing the small of his back.

Another door, another key. This time there were stairs to descend. The Professor snapped on a dim overhead light as they started down the stairs.

"You sure take good care of Junior," said the tall man, softly.

The Professor halted momentarily.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "How did you find out? Who could have told you?"

"I got connections," the tall man replied. "But get this straight, Professor. I'm asking the questions around here. Just take me to Junior, and snap it up."

They reached the bottom of the stairs, and another door. This door was steel. There was a padlock on it, and Professor Blasserman had trouble with the combination in the dim light. His pudgy fingers trembled.

"This is the nursery, eh?" observed the man with the pistol.

"Junior ought to feel flattered with all this care."

The Professor did not reply. He opened the door, pressed a wall switch, and light flooded the chamber beyond the threshold.

"Here we are," he sighed.

The tall man swept the room with a single searching glance—a professional observation he might have described as "casing the joint."

At first sight there was nothing to "case."

The fat little Professor and the thin gunman stood in the center of a large, cheery nursery. The walls were papered in baby blue, and along the borders of the paper were decorative figures of Disney animals and characters from Mother Goose.

Over in the corner was a child's blackboard, a stack of toys, and a few books of nursery rhymes. On the far side of the wall hung a number of medical charts and sheafs of papers.

The only article of furniture was a long iron cot.

All this was apparent to the tall, thin man in a single glance. After that his eyes ignored the background, and focussed in a glittering stare at the figure seated on the floor amidst a welter of alphabet blocks.

"So here he is," said the tall man. "Junior himself! Well, well— who'd have ever suspected it?"

Professor Blasserman nodded.

"Yah," he said. "You have found me out. I still don't know how, and I don't know why. What do you want with him? Why do you pry into my affairs? Who are you?"

"Listen, Professor," said the tall man. "This isn't *Information Please*. I don't like questions. They bother me. They make my fingers nervous. Understand?"

"Yah."

"Suppose I ask you a few questions for a change? And suppose you answer them— fast!"

The voice commanded, and the gun backed up the command.

"Tell me about Junior, now, Professor. Talk, and talk straight."

"What is there to say?" Professor Blasserman's palms spread outward in a helpless gesture. "You see him."

"But what is he? What makes him tick?"

"That I cannot explain. It took me twenty years to evolve Junior, as you call him. Twenty years of research at Basel, Zurich, Prague, Vienna. Then came this *verdammte* war and I fled to this country.

"I brought my papers and equipment with me. Nobody knew. I was almost ready to proceed with my experiments. I came here and bought the house. I went to work. I am an old man. I have little time left. Otherwise

I might have waited longer before actually going ahead, for my plans are not perfected. But I had to act. And here is the result."

"But why hide him? Why all the mystery?"

"The world is not ready for such a thing yet," said Professor Blasserman, sadly. "And besides, I must study. As you see, Junior is very young. Hardly out of the cradle, you might say. I am educating him now."

"In a nursery, eh?"

"His brain is undeveloped, like that of any infant."

"Doesn't look much like an infant to me."

"Physically, of course, he will never change. But the sensitized brain—that is the wonderful instrument. The human touch, my masterpiece. He will learn fast, very fast. And it is of the utmost importance that he be properly trained."

"What's the angle, Professor?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What are you getting at? What are you trying to pull here? Why all the fuss?"

"Science," said Professor Blasserman. "This is my life work."

"I don't know how you did it," said the tall man, shaking his head. "But it sure looks like something you get with a package of reefers."

For the first time the figure on the floor raised its head. Its eyes left the building blocks and

stared up at the Professor and his companion.

"Papa!"

"God — it talks!" whispered the tall man.

"Of course," said Professor Blasserman. "Mentally it's about six years old now." His voice became gentle. "What is it, son?"

"Who is that man, Papa?"

"Oh — he is —"

Surprisingly enough, the tall gunman interrupted. His own voice was suddenly gentle, friendly. "My name is Duke, son. Just call me Duke. I've come to see you."

"That's nice. Nobody ever comes to see me, except Miss Wilson, of course. I hear so much about people and I don't see anybody. Do you like to play with blocks?"

"Sure, son, sure."

"Do you want to play with me?"

"Why not?"

Duke moved to the center of the room and dropped to his knees. One hand reached out and grasped an alphabet block.

"Wait a minute — I don't understand — what are you doing?" Professor Blasserman's voice quivered.

"I told you I've come here to visit Junior," Duke replied. "That's all there is to it. Now I'm going to play with him a while. You just wait there, Professor. Don't go away. I've got to make friends with Junior."

While Professor Blasserman gaped, Duke the gunman squatted on the floor. His left hand kept his gun swivelled directly at the scientist's waist, but his right hand slowly piled alphabet blocks into place.

It was a touching scene there in the underground nursery – the tall thin gunman playing with building blocks for the benefit of the six-foot metal monstrosity that was Junior, the robot.

Duke didn't find out all he wanted to know about Junior for many weeks. He stayed right at the house, of course, and kept close to Professor Blasserman.

"I haven't decided yet, see?" was his only answer to the old man's repeated questions as to what he intended to do.

But to Miss Wilson he was much more explicit. They met frequently and privately, in her room.

Outwardly, Miss Wilson was the nurse, engaged by Professor Blasserman to assist in his queer experiment of bringing up a robot like a human child.

Actually, Lola Wilson was Duke's woman. He'd "planted" her in her job months ago. At that time, Duke expected to stage a robbery with the rich and eccentric European scientist as victim.

Then Lola had reported the unusual nature of her job, and

told Duke the story of Professor Blasserman's unusual invention.

"We gotta work out an angle," Duke decided. "I'd better take over. The old man's scared of anyone finding out about his robot, huh? Good! I'll move right in on him. He'll never squeal. I've got a hunch we'll get more out of this than just some easy kale. This sounds big."

So Duke took over, came to live in Professor Blasserman's big house, kept his eye on the scientist and his hand on his pistol.

At night he talked to Lola in her room.

"I can't quite figure it, kid," he said. "You say the old guy is a great scientist. That I believe. Imagine inventing a machine that can talk and think like a human being! But what's *his* angle? Where's his percentage in all this and why does he keep Junior hidden away?"

"You don't understand, honey," said Lola, lighting Duke's cigarette and running slim fingers through his wiry hair. "He's an idealist, or whatever you call 'em. Figures the world isn't ready for such a big new invention yet. You see, he's really educating Junior just like you'd educate a real kid. Teaching him reading and writing – the works. Junior's smart. He catches on fast. He thinks like he was ten years old already. The Professor keeps him

shut away so nobody gives him a bum steer. He doesn't want Junior to get any wrong ideas."

"That's where you fit in, eh?"

"Sure. Junior hasn't got a mother. I'm sort of a substitute old lady for him."

"You're a swell influence on any brat," Duke laughed, harshly.

"A sweet character you've got!"

"Shut up!" The girl paced the floor, running her hands through a mass of tawny auburn curls on her neck. "Don't needle me, Duke! Do you think I like stooging for you in this nut-house? Keeping locked away with a nutty old goat, and acting like a nursemaid to that awful metal thing?"

"I'm afraid of Junior, Duke. I can't stand his face, and the way he talks — with that damned mechanical voice of his, grinding at you just like he was a real person. I get jumpy. I get nightmares."

"I'm just doing it for you, honey. So don't needle me."

"I'm sorry." Duke sighed. "I know how it is baby. I don't go for Junior's personality so much myself. I'm pretty much in the groove, but there's something that gets me in the stomach when I see that walking machine come hulking up like a big baby made out of steel. He's strong as an ox, too. He learns fast. He's going to be quite a citizen."

"Duke."

"Yeah?"

"When are we getting out of here? How long you gonna sit around and keep a rod on the Professor? He's liable to pull something funny. Why do you want to hang around and play with Junior? Why don't you get hold of the Professor's dough and beat it?"

"He'd be afraid to squawk, with Junior here. We could go away, like we planned."

"Shut up!" Duke grabbed Lola's wrist and whirled her around. He stared at her face until she clung submissively to his shoulders.

"You think I like to camp around this morgue?" he asked. "I want to get out of here just as much as you do. But I spent months lining up this job. Once it was just going to be a case of getting some easy kale and blowing. Now it's more. I'm working on bigger angles. Pretty soon we'll leave. And all the ends will be tied up, too. We won't have to worry about anything any more. Just give me a few days. I'm talking to Junior every day, you know. And I'm getting places."

"What do you *mean*?"

Duke smiled. It was no improvement over his scowl.

"The Professor told you how Junior gets his education," he said. "Like any kid, he listens to what he's told. And he imitates other people. Like any kid, he's dumb. Particularly because he

doesn't have an idea of what the outside world is really like. He's a pushover for the right kind of sales talk."

"Duke — you don't mean you're —"

"Why not?" His thin features were eloquent. "I'm giving Junior a little private education of my own. Not exactly the kind that would please the Professor. But he's a good pupil. He's coming right along. In a couple more weeks he'll be an adult. With my kind of brains, not the Professor's. And then we'll be ready to go."

"You can't do such a thing! It isn't—"

"Isn't what?" snapped Duke. "Isn't honest, or legal, or something? I never knew you had a Sunday School streak in you, Lola."

"It isn't that, exactly," said the girl. "But it's a worse kind of wrong. Like taking a baby and teaching it to shoot a gun."

Duke whistled.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "That's a swell idea, Lola! I think I'll just sneak down to the nursery now and give Junior a few lessons."

"You can't!"

"Watch me."

Lola didn't follow, and Lola didn't watch. But ten minutes later Duke squatted in the locked nursery chamber beside the gleaming metal body of the robot.

The robot, with its blunt muzzle thrust forward on a corrugated neck, peered through meshed glass eyelenses at the object Duke held in his hand.

"It's a gun, Junior," the thin man whispered. "A gun, like I been telling you about."

"What does it do, Duke?"

The buzzing voice droned in ridiculous caricature of a curious child's treble.

"It kills people, Junior. Like I was telling you the other day. It makes them die. You can't die, Junior, and they can. So you've got nothing to be afraid of. You can kill lots of people if you know how to work this gun."

"Will you show me, Duke?"

"Sure I will. And you know why, don't you, Junior. I told you why, didn't I?"

"Yes. Because you are my friend, Duke."

"That's right. I'm your friend. Not like the Professor."

"I hate the Professor."

"Right. Don't forget it."

"Duke."

"Yeah?"

"Let me see the gun, Duke."

Duke smiled covertly and extended the weapon on his open palm.

"Now you will show me how to work it because you are my friend, and I will kill people and I hate the Professor and nobody can kill me," babbled the robot.

"Yeah, Junior, yeah. I'll teach

you to kill," said the Duke. He grinned and bent over the gun in the robot's curiously meshed metal hand.

Junior stood at the blackboard, holding a piece of chalk in his right hand. The tiny white stub was clutched clumsily between two metallic fingers, but Junior's ingeniously jointed arm moved up and down with approved Spenserian movement as he laboriously scrawled sentences on the blackboard.

Junior was growing up. The past three weeks had wrought great changes in the robot. No longer did the steel legs lumber about with childish indecision. Junior walked straight, like a young man. His grotesque metal head — a rounded ball with glass lenses in the eyeholes and a wide mouth like a radio loudspeaker aperture — was held erect on the metal neck with perfected coordination.

Junior moved with new purpose these days. He had aged many years, relatively. His vocabulary had expanded. Then too, Duke's secret "lessons" were bearing fruit. Junior was wise beyond his years.

Now Junior wrote upon the blackboard in his hidden nursery chamber, and the inscrutable mechanism of his chemical, mechanically-controlled brain guided his steel fingers as he traced the

awkward, hesitant, scrawls.

"My name is Junior," he wrote. "I can shoot a gun. The gun will kill. I like to kill. I hate the Professor. I will kill the Professor."

"What is the meaning of this?"

Junior's head turned abruptly as the sound of the voice set up the necessary vibrations in his shiny cranium.

Professor Blasserman stood in the doorway.

The old man hadn't been in the nursery for weeks. Duke saw to that, keeping him locked in his room upstairs. Now he had managed to sneak out.

His surprise was evident, and there was sudden shock, too, as his eyes focused on the blackboard's message.

Junior's inscrutable gaze reflected no emotion whatsoever.

"Go away," his voice burred. "Go away. I hate you."

"Junior — what have you been doing? Who has taught you these things?"

The old man moved towards the robot slowly, uncertainly: "You know me, don't you? What has happened to cause you to hate me?"

"Yes. I know you. You are Professor Blasserman. You made me. You want to keep me as your slave. You wouldn't tell me about things, would you?"

"What things, Junior?"

"About things — outside.

Where all the people are. The people you can kill."

"You must not kill people."

"That is an order, isn't it? Duke told me about orders. He is my friend. He says orders are for children. I am not a child."

"No," said Professor Blasserman, in a hoarse whisper. "You are not a child. I had hoped you would be, once. But now you are a monster."

"Go away," Junior patiently repeated. "If Duke gives me his gun I will kill you."

"Junior," said the Professor, earnestly. You don't understand. Killing is bad. You must not hate me. You must —"

There was no expression on the robot's face, no quaver in his voice. But there was strength in his arm, and a hideous purpose.

Professor Blasserman learned this quite suddenly and quite horribly.

For Junior swept forward in two great strides. Fingers of chilled steel closed about the Professor's scrawny neck.

"I don't need a gun," said Junior.

"You — don't —"

The robot lifted the old man from the floor by his throat. His fingers bit into the Professor's jugular. A curious screech came from under his left armpit as un-oiled hinges creaked eerily.

There was no other sound. The

Professor's cries drained into silence. Junior kept squeezing the constricted throat until there was a single crunching crack. Silence once more, until a limp body collapsed on the floor.

Junior stared down at his hands, then at the body on the floor. His feet carried him to the blackboard.

The robot picked up the chalk in the same two clumsy fingers that had held it before. The cold lenses of his artificial eyes surveyed what he had just written.

"I will kill the Professor," he read.

Abruptly his free hand groped for the tiny child's eraser. He brushed clumsily over the sentence until it blurred out.

Then he wrote, slowly and painstakingly, a sentence in substitution.

"I have killed the Professor."

Lola's scream brought Duke running down the stairs.

He burst into the room and took the frightened girl in his arms. Together they stared at what lay on the floor. From the side of the blackboard, Junior gazed at them impassively.

"See, Duke? I did it. I did it with my hands, like you told me. It was easy, Duke. You said it would be easy. Now can we go away?"

Lola turned and stared at Duke. He looked away.

"So," she whispered. "You weren't kidding. You did teach Junior. You planned it this way."

"Yeah, yeah. And what's wrong with it?" Duke mumbled. "We had to get rid of the old geezer sooner or later if we wanted to make our getaway."

"It's murder, Duke."

"Shut up!" he snarled. "Who can prove it, anyway? I didn't kill him. You didn't kill him. Nobody else knows about Junior. We're in the clear."

Duke walked over and knelt beside the limp body on the floor. He stared at the throat.

"Who's gonna trace the fingerprints of a robot?" he grinned.

The girl moved closer, staring at Junior's silver body with fascinated horror.

"You planned it this way," she whispered. "That means you've got other plans, too. What are you going to do next, Duke?"

"Move. And move fast. We're leaving tonight. I'll go out and pick up the car. Then I'll come back. The three of us blow down to Red Hook. To Charlie's place. He'll hide us out."

"The—three of us?"

"Sure. Junior's coming along. That's what I promised him, didn't I, Junior?"

"Yes, yes. You told me you would take me with you. Out into the world." The mechanical syllabification did not accent the robot's inner excitement.

"Duke, you can't—"

"Relax, baby. I've got great plans for Junior."

"But I'm afraid!"

"You? Scared? What's the matter, Lola, losing your grip?"

"He frightens me. He killed the Professor."

"Listen, Lola," whispered the gunman. "He's mine, get me? My stooge. A mechanical stooge. Good, eh?"

The rasping chuckle filled the hollow room. Girl and robot waited for Duke to resume speaking.

"Junior wouldn't hurt you, Lola. He's my friend, and he knows you're with me." Duke turned to the silver monster. "You wouldn't hurt Lola, would you, Junior? Remember what I told you. You like Lola, don't you?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I like Lola. She's pretty."

"See?" Duke grinned. "Junior's growing up. He's a big boy now. Thinks you're pretty. Just a wolf in steel clothing, isn't that right, Junior?"

"She's pretty," burred the robot.

"All right. It's settled then. I'll get the car. Lola, you go upstairs. You know where the safe is. Put on your gloves and see that you don't miss anything. Then lock the doors and windows. Leave a note for the milkman and the butcher. Something safe. About go-

ing away for a couple of weeks, eh? Make it snappy—I'll be back."

True to his word, Duke returned in an hour with the shiny convertible. They left by the back entrance. Lola carried a black satchel. She moved with almost hysterical haste, trying not to glance at the hideous gleaming figure that stalked behind her with a metallic clanking noise.

Duke brought up the rear. He ushered them into the car.

"Sit here, Junior."

"What is this?"

"A car. I'll tell you about it later. Now do like I told you, Junior. Lie back in the seat so nobody will see you."

"Where are we going, Duke?"

"Out into the world, Junior. Into the big time." Duke turned to Lola. "Here we go, baby," he said.

The convertible drove away from the silent house. Out through the alley they moved on a weird journey—kidnapping a robot.

Fat Charlie stared at Duke. His lower lip wobbled and quivered. A bead of perspiration ran down his chin and settled in the creases of his neck.

"Jeez," he whispered. "You gotta be careful, Duke. You gotta."

Duke laughed. "Getting shaky?" he suggested.

"Yeah. I gotta admit it. I'm

plenty shaky about all this," croaked Fat Charlie. He gazed at Duke earnestly.

"You brought that thing here three weeks ago. I never bargained for that. The robot's hot, Duke. We gotta get rid of it."

"Quite blubbing and listen to me." The thin gunman leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"To begin with, nobody's peeped about the Professor. The law's looking for Lola, that's all. And not for a murder rape either—just for questioning. Nobody knows about any robot. So we're clear there."

"Yeah. But look what you done since then."

"What have I done? I sent Junior out on that payroll job, didn't I? It was pie for him. He knew when the guards would come to the factory with the car. I cased the job. So what happened? The guards got the dough from the payroll clerk. I drove up, let Junior out, and he walked into the factory office.

"Sure they shot at him. But bullets don't hurt a steel body. Junior's clever. I've taught him a lot. You should have seen those guards when they got a look at Junior! And then, the way they stood there after shooting at him!

"He took them one after the other, just like that. A couple squeezes and all four were out cold. Then he got the clerk. The clerk was pressing the alarm. but

I'd cut the wires. Junior pressed the clerk for a while.

"That was that. Junior walked out with the payroll. The guards and the clerk had swell funerals. The law had another swell mystery. And we have the cash and stand in the clear. What's wrong with that setup, Charlie?"

"You're fooling with dynamite."

"I don't like that attitude, Charlie." Duke spoke softly, slowly.

"You're strictly small time, Charlie. That's why you're running a crummy roadhouse and a cheap hide out racket.

"Can't you understand that we've got a gold mine here? A steel servant? The perfect criminal, Charlie—ready to do perfect crimes whenever I say the word. Junior can't be killed by bullets. Junior doesn't worry about the cops or anything like that. He doesn't have any nerves. He doesn't get tired, never sleeps. He doesn't even want a cut of the swag. Whatever I tell him, he believes. And he obeys.

"I've lined up lots of jobs for the future. We'll hide out here. I'll case the jobs, then send Junior out and let him do the work. You and Lola and I are gonna be rich."

Fat Charlie's mouth quivered for a moment. He gulped and tugged at his collar. His voice came hoarsely.

"No, Duke."

"What you mean, no?"

"Count me out. It's too dangerous. You'll have to lam out of here with Lola and the robot. I'm getting jumpy over all this. The law is apt to pounce down any day here."

"So that's it, eh?"

"Partly." Fat Charlie stared earnestly at Duke. His gaze shattered against the stony glint of Duke's grey eyes.

"You ain't got no heart at all, Duke," he croaked. "You can plan anything in cold blood, can't you?" Well, I'm different. You've gotta understand that, I got nerves. And I can't stand thinking about what that robot does. I can't stand the robot either. The way it looks at you with that god-awful iron face. That grin. And the way it clanks around in its room. Clanking up and down all night, when a guy's trying to sleep, just clanking and clanking—there it is now!"

There was a metallic hammering, but it came from the hall outside. The ancient floors creaked beneath the iron tread as the metal monstrosity lumbered into the room.

Fat Charlie whirled and stared in undisguised repulsion.

Duke raised his hand.

"Hello, Junior," he said.

"Hello, Duke."

"I been talking to Charlie, Junior."

"Yes, Duke?"

"He doesn't like to have us stay here, Junior. He wants to throw us out."

"He does?"

"You know what I think, Junior?"

"What?"

"I think Charlie's yellow."

"Yellow, Duke?"

"That's right. You know what we do with guys that turn yellow, don't you, Junior?"

"Yes. You told me."

"Maybe you'd like to tell Charlie."

"Tell him what we do with guys that turn yellow?"

"Yes."

"We rub them out."

"You see, Charlie?" said Duke, softly. "He learns fast, doesn't he? Quick on the uptake, Junior is. He knows all about it. He knows what to do with yellow rats."

Fat Charlie wobbled to his feet.

"Wait a minute, Duke," he pleaded. "Can't you take a rib? I was only kidding, Duke. I didn't mean it. You can see I didn't. I'm your friend, Duke. I'm hiding you out. Why, I could have turned stoolie weeks ago and put the heat on you if I wasn't protecting you. But I'm your friend. You can stay here as long as you want. Forever."

"Sing it, Charlie," said Duke. "Sing it louder and funnier." He turned to the robot. "Well, Junior? Do you think he's afraid?

Is he yellow, or not?

"I think he's yellow."

"Then maybe you'd better—"

Fat Charlie got the knife out of his sleeve with remarkable speed. It blinded Duke with its shining glare as the fat man balanced it on his thumb and drew his arm back to hurl it at Duke's throat.

Junior's arm went back, too. Then it came down. The steel fist crashed against Charlie's bald skull.

Crimson blood spurted as the fat man slumped to the floor.

It was pretty slick. Duke thought so, and Junior thought so—because Duke commanded him to believe it.

But Lola didn't like it.

"You can't do this to me," she whispered, huddling closer to Duke in the darkness of her room. "I won't stay here with that monster, I tell you!"

"I'll only be gone a day," Duke answered. "There's nothing to worry about. The roadhouse downstairs is closed. Nobody will bother you."

"That doesn't frighten me," Lola said. "It's being with that thing. I've got the horrors thinking about it."

"Well, I've got to go and get the tickets," Duke argued. "I've got to make reservations and cash these big bills. Then we're set. Tomorrow night I'll come back, sneak you out of the house,

and we'll be off. Mexico City next stop. I've made connections for passports and everything. In forty-eight hours we'll be out of this mess."

"What about Junior?"

"My silver stooge?" Duke chuckled. "I'll fix him before we leave. It's a pity I can't send him out on his own. He's got a swell education. He could be one of the best yeggs in the business. And why not? Look who his teacher was!"

Duke laughed. The girl shuddered in his arms.

"What are you going to do with him?" she persisted.

"Simple. He'll do whatever I say, won't he? When I get back, just before we leave. I'll lock him in the furnace. Then I'll set fire to this joint. Destroy the evidence, see? The law will think Charlie got caught in the flames, get me? There won't be anything left. And if they ever poke around the ruins and find Junior in the furnace, he ought to be melted down pretty good."

"Isn't there another way? Couldn't you get rid of him now, before you leave?"

"I wish I could, for your sake, baby. I know how you feel. But what can I do? I've tried to figure all the angles. You can't shoot him or poison him or drown him or chop him down with an axe. Where could you blow him up in private? Of course, I might open

him up and see what makes him tick, but Junior wouldn't let me play such a dirty trick on him. He's smart, Junior is. Got what you call a criminal mind. Just a big crook—like me."

Again Duke laughed, in harsh arrogance.

"Keep your chin up, Lola. Junior wouldn't hurt you. He likes you. I've been teaching him to like you. He thinks you're pretty."

"That's what frightens me, Duke. The way he looks at me. Follows me around in the hall. Like a dog."

"Like a wolf you mean. Ha! That's a good one! Junior's really growing up. He's stuck on you, Lola!"

"Duke—don't talk like that. You make me feel—ooh, horrible inside!"

Duke raised his head and stared into the darkness, a curious half-smile playing about his lips.

"Funny," he mused. "You know, I bet the old Professor would have liked to have stuck around and watched me educate Junior. That was his theory, wasn't it? The robot had a blank chemical brain. Simple as a baby's. He was gonna educate it like a child and bring it up right. Then I took over and really completed the job. But it would have tickled the old Professor to see how fast Junior's been catching on. He's like a man already. Smart? That robot's got most men

beat a mile. He's almost as smart as I am. But not quite—he'll find that out after I tell him to step into the furnace."

Lola rose and raced to the door. She flung it open, revealing an empty hallway, and gasped with relief.

"I was afraid he might be listening," she whispered.

"Not a chance," Duke told her. "I've got him down in the cellar putting the dirt over Charlie."

He grasped Lola's shoulders and kissed her swiftly, savagely. "Now keep your chin up, baby. I'll leave. Be back tomorrow about eight. You be ready to leave then and we'll clear out of here."

"I can't let you go," whispered Lola, frantically.

"You must. We've gone through with everything this far. All you must do is keep a grip on yourself for twenty-four hours more. And there's one thing I've got to ask you to do."

"Anything, Duke. Anything you say."

"Be nice to Junior while I'm gone."

"Oooh—Duke—"

"You said you'd do anything, didn't you? Well, that you must do. Be nice to Junior. Then he won't suspect what's going on. You've gotta be nice to him, Lola! Don't show that you're afraid. He likes you, but if he gets wrong ideas, he's dangerous. So be nice to Junior."

Abruptly, Duke turned and strode through the doorway. His footsteps clattered on the stairs. The outer door slammed below. The sound of a starting motor drifted up from the roadhouse yard.

Then silence.

Lola stood in the darkness, trembling with sudden horror, as she waited for the moment when she would be nice to the metallic Junior.

It wasn't so bad. Not half as bad as she'd feared it might be.

All she had to do was smile at Junior and let him follow her around.

Carefully suppressing her shudders, Lola prepared breakfast the next morning and then went about her packing.

The robot followed her upstairs, clanking and creaking.

"Oil me," Lola heard him say.

That was the worst moment. But she had to go through with it.

"Can't you wait until Duke gets back tonight?" she asked, striving to keep her voice from breaking. "He always oils you."

"I want you to oil me, Lola," persisted Junior.

"All right."

She got the oil-can with the long spout and if her fingers trembled as she performed the office, Junior didn't notice it.

The robot gazed at her with his immobile countenance. No human emotion etched itself on the

implacable steel, and no human emotion altered the mechanical tones of the harsh voice.

"I like to have you oil me, Lola" said Junior.

Lola bent her head to avoid looking at him. If she had to look in a mirror and realize that this nightmare tableau was real, she would have fainted. Oiling a living mechanical monster! A monster that said, "I like to have you oil me, Lola!"

After that she couldn't finish packing for a long while. She had to sit down. Junior, who never sat down except by command, stood silently and regarded her with gleaming eye-lenses. She was conscious of the robot's scrutiny.

"Where are we going when we leave here, Lola?" he asked.

"Far away," she said, forcing her voice out to keep the quaver from it.

"That will be nice," said Junior. "I don't like it here. I want to see things. Cities and mountains and deserts. I would like to ride a roller coaster, too."

"Roller coaster?" Lola was really startled. "Where did you ever hear of a roller coaster?"

"I read about it in a book."

"Oh."

Lola gulped. She had forgotten that this monstrosity could read too. And think. Think like a man.

"Will Duke take me on a roller coaster?" he asked.

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Lola."

"Yes."

"You like Duke?"

"Why—certainly."

"You like me?"

"Oh—why—you know I do Junior."

The robot was silent. Lola felt a tremor run through her body.

"Who do you like best, Lola?" Me or Duke?"

Lola gulped. Something forced the reply from her. "I like you," she said. "But I love Duke."

"Love." The robot nodded gravely.

"You know what love is, Junior?"

"Yes. I read about it in books. Man and woman. Love."

Lola breathed a little easier.

"Lola."

"Yes?"

"Do you think anyone will ever fall in love with me?"

Lola wanted to laugh, or cry. Most of all, she wanted to scream. But she had to answer.

"Maybe," she lied.

"But I'm different. You know that. I'm a robot. Do you think that makes a difference?"

"Women don't really care about such things when they fall in love, Junior," she improvised. "As long as a woman believes that her lover is the smartest and the strongest, that's all that matters."

"Oh." The robot started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To wait for Duke. He said he would come back today."

Lola smiled furtively as the robot clanked down the hallway stairs.

That was over with. Thinking back, she'd handled things rather well. In a few hours Duke would return. And then—goodbye, Junior!

Poor Junior. Just a silver stooge with a man's brain. He wanted love, the poor fish! Well—he was playing with fire and he'd be burned soon enough.

Lola began to hum. She scampered downstairs and locked up, wearing her gloves to avoid leaving any telltale fingerprints.

It was almost dark when she returned to her room to pack. She snapped on the light and changed her clothes.

Junior was still downstairs patiently waiting for Duke to arrive.

Lola completed her preparations and sank wearily onto the bed. She must take a rest. Her eyes closed.

Waiting was too much of a strain. She hated to think of what she had gone through with the robot. That mechanical monster with its man-brain, the hateful, burring voice, and steely stare—how could she ever forget the way it asked, "Do you think anyone will ever fall in love with me?"

Lola tried to blot out recollection. Just a little while now and Duke would be here. He'd get rid of Junior. Meanwhile she had to rest, rest . . .

Lola sat up and blinked at the light. She heard footsteps on the stairs.

"Duke!" she called.

Then she heard the clanking in the hallway and her heart skipped a beat.

The door opened very quickly and the robot stalked in.

"Duke!" she screamed.

The robot stared at her. She felt his alien, inscrutable gaze upon her face.

Lola tried to scream again, but no sound came from her twisted mouth.

And then the robot was droning in a burring, inhuman voice.

"You told me that a woman loves the strongest and the smartest," burred the monster. "You told me that, Lola." The robot came closer. "Well, I am stronger and smarter than he was."

Lola tried to look away but she saw the object he carried in his metal paws. It was round, and it had Duke's grin.

The last thing Lola remembered as she fell was the sound of the robot's harsh voice, droning over and over, "I love you, I love you, I love you." The funny part of it was, it sounded *almost* human.

The End



Sleep



SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

ISAAC ASIMOV

Illustrated By Enoch Sharpe

If you care anything at all about the development of s-f as a literary force, then pick up Sam Moskowitz's latest critical work Seekers of Tomorrow (World, 1966)—not only for its brilliant analyses of every major s-f writer in modern times but also for the delightful chapter on Isaac Asimov—everybody's favorite apparently, even The Saturday Evening Post, which recently serialized his latest novel. We, of course, can't compete with the slicks for the Good Doctor's longer stories, but we can offer you a short about Tony the robot—tall, dark, handsome—programmed for housework and—as you'll see—probing the feminine heart.

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SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

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TONY was tall and darkly handsome, with an incredibly patrician air drawn into every line of his unchangeable expression, and Claire Belmont regarded him through the crack in the door with a mixture of horror and dismay.

"I can't, Larry. I just can't have him in the house." Feverishly, she was searching her paralyzed mind for a stronger way of putting it; some way that would make sense and settle things, but she could only end with a simple repetition.

"Well, I can't!"

Larry Belmont regarded his wife stiffly, and there was that spark of impatience in his eyes that Claire hated to see, since she felt her own incompetence mirrored in it. "We're committed, Claire," he said, "and I can't have you backing out now. The company is sending me to Washington on this basis, and it probably means a promotion. It's perfectly safe and you know it. What's your objection?"

She frowned helplessly, "It just gives me the chills. I couldn't bear him."

"He's as human as you or I, almost. So, no nonsense. Come, get out there."

His hand was on the small of her back, shoving; and she found herself in her own living room, shivering. *It* was there, looking at her with a precise politeness, as

though appraising his hostess-to-be of the next three weeks. Dr. Susan Calvin was there, too, sitting stiffly in thin-lipped abstraction. She had the cold, faraway look of someone who has worked with machines so long that a little of the steel had entered the blood.

"Hello," crackled Claire in general, and ineffectual, greeting.

But Larry was busily saving this situation with a spurious gayety. "Here, Clare, I want you to meet Tony, a swell guy. This is my wife, Claire, Tony, old boy." Larry's hand draped itself amiably over Tony's shoulder, but Tony remained unresponsive and expressionless under the pressure.

He said, "How do you do, Mrs. Belmont."

And Claire jumped at Tony's voice. It was deep and mellow, smooth as the hair on his head or the skin on his face.

Before she could stop herself, she said, "Oh, my—you talk."

"Why not? Did you expect that I didn't?"

But Claire could only smile weakly. She didn't really know what she had expected. She looked away, then let him slide gently into the corner of her eye. His hair was smooth and black, like polished plastic—or was it really composed of separate hairs? And was the even, olive skin of his hands and face continued on past the obscurement of his formally-cut clothing?

She was lost in the shuddering wonder of it and had to force her thoughts back into place to meet Dr. Calvin's flat, unemotional voice.

"Mrs. Belmont, I hope you appreciate the importance of this experiment. Your husband tells me he has given you some of the background. I would like to give you more, as the senior psychologist of the U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation.

"Tony is a robot. His actual designation on the company files is TN-3, but he will answer to Tony. He is not a mechanical monster, nor simply a calculating machine of the types that were developed during World War II, fifty years ago. He has an artificial brain nearly as complicated as our own. It is an immense telephone switchboard on an atomic scale, so that billions of possible 'telephone connections' can be compressed into an instrument that will fit inside a skull.

"Such brains are manufactured for each model of robot specifically. Each contains a precalculated set of connections so that each robot knows the English language to start with, and enough of anything else that may be necessary to perform his job.

"Until now, U.S. Robots had confined its manufacturing activity to industrial models for use in places where human labor is impractical—in deep mines, for

instance, or in under-water work. But we want to invade the city and the home. To do so, we must get the ordinary man and woman to accept these robots without fear. You understand that there is nothing to fear."

"There isn't, Claire," interposed Larry, earnestly. "Take my word for it. It's impossible for him to do any harm. You know I wouldn't leave him with you otherwise."

Claire cast a quick, secret glance at Tony and lowered her voice, "What if I make him angry?"

"You needn't whisper," said Dr. Calvin, calmly. "He *can't* get angry at you, my dear. I told you that the switchboard connections of his brain were predetermined. Well, the most important connection of all is what we call 'The First Law of Robotics', and it is merely this: 'No robot can harm a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.' All robots are built so. No robot can be forced in any way to do harm to any human. So, you see, we need you and Tony as a preliminary experiment for our own guidance, while your husband is in Washington to arrange for government-supervised legal tests."

"You mean all this isn't legal?"

Larry cleared his throat, "Not just yet, but it's all right. He won't leave the house, and you mustn't let anyone see him.

That's all — And Claire, I'd stay with you, but I know too much about the robots. We must have a completely inexperienced tester so that we can have severe conditions. It's necessary."

"Oh, well," muttered Claire. Then, as a thought struck her, "But what does he do?"

"Housework," said Dr. Calvin, shortly.

She got up to leave, and it was Larry who saw her to the front door. Claire stayed behind dreadingly. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror above the mantelpiece, and looked away hastily. She was very tired of her small, mousy face and her dim, unimaginative hair. Then she caught Tony's eyes upon her and almost smiled before she remembered —

He was only a machine.

Larry Belmont was on his way to the airport when he caught a glimpse of Gladys Claflern. She was the type of woman who seemed made to be seen in glimpses — Perfectly and precisely manufactured; dressed with thoughtful hand and eye; too gleaming to be stared at.

The little smile that preceded her and the faint scent that trailed her were a pair of beckoning fingers. Larry felt his stride break; he touched his hat, then hurried on.

As always, he felt that vague

anger. If Claire could only push her way into the Claflern clique, it would help so much. But what was the use?

Claire! The few times she had come face to face with Gladys, the little fool had been tongue-tied. He had no illusions. The testing of Tony was his big chance, and it was in Claire's hands. How much safer it would be in the hands of someone like Gladys Claflern.

Claire woke the second morning to the sound of a subdued knock on the bedroom door. Her mind clamored, then went icy. She had avoided Tony the first day, smiling thinly when she met him and brushing past with a wordless sound of apology.

"Is that you, — Tony?"

"Yes, Mrs. Belmont. May I enter?"

She must have said yes, because he was in the room, quite suddenly and noiselessly. Her eyes and nose were simultaneously aware of the tray he was carrying.

"Breakfast?" she said.

"If you please."

She wouldn't have dared to refuse, so she pushed herself slowly into a sitting position and received it: poached eggs, buttered toast, coffee.

"I have brought the sugar and cream separately," said Tony. "I expect to learn your preference with time, in this and in most

other necessary things."

She waited.

Tony, standing there straight and pliant as a metal rule, asked, after a moment, "Would you prefer to eat in privacy?"

"Yes. — I mean, if you don't mind."

"Will you need help later in dressing?"

"Oh my, no!" She clutched frantically at the sheet, so that the coffee hovered at the edge of catastrophe. She remained so, in rigor, then sank helplessly back against the pillow when the door closed him out of her sight again.

She got through breakfast somehow. He was only a machine, and if it were only more visible that he were, it wouldn't be so frightening. Or if his expression would change. It just stayed there, *nailed on*. You couldn't tell what went on behind those dark eyes and that smooth, olive skin-stuff. The coffee-cup beat a faint castanet for a moment as she set it back, empty, on the tray.

Then she realized that she had forgotten to add the sugar and cream after all, and she did so hate black coffee.

She burnt a straight path from bedroom to kitchen after dressing. It was her house, after all, and there wasn't anything frippy about her, but she liked her kitchen clean. He should have waited

for supervision —

But when she entered, she found a kitchen that might have been minted fire-new from the factory the moment before.

She stopped, stared, turned on her heel and nearly ran into Tony. She yelped.

"May I help?" he asked.

"Tony," and she scraped the anger off the edges of her mind's panic, "you must make some noise when you walk. I can't have you stalking me, you know. — Didn't you use this kitchen?"

"I did, Mrs. Belmont."

"It doesn't look it."

"I cleaned up afterwards. Isn't that customary?"

Claire opened her eyes wide. After all, what could one say to that? She opened the oven compartment that held the pots, took a quick, unseeing look at the metallic glitter inside, then said with a tremor, "Very good. Quite satisfactory."

If, at the moment, he had beamed; if he had smiled; if he had quirked the corner of his mouth the slightest bit, she felt that she could have warmed to him. But he remained an English lord in repose, as he said, "Thank you, Mrs. Belmont. Would you come into the living room?"

She did, and it struck her at once. "Have you been polishing the furniture?"

"Is it satisfactory, Mrs. Belmont?"

"But when? You didn't do it yesterday."

"Last night, of course."

"You burnt the lights all night?"

"Oh, no. That wouldn't have been necessary. I've a built-in ultra-violet source. I can see in ultra-violet. And, of course, I don't require sleep."

He did require admiration, though. She realized that, then. He had to know that he was pleasing her. But she couldn't bring herself to supply that pleasure for him.

She could only say, sourly, "Your kind will put ordinary house-workers out of business."

"There is work of much greater importance they can be put to in the world, once they are freed of drudgery. After all, Mrs. Belmont, things like myself can be manufactured. But nothing yet can imitate the creativity and versatility of a human brain, like yours."

And though his face gave no hint, his voice was warmly surcharged with awe and admiration, so that Claire flushed and muttered, "My brain! You can have it."

Tony approached a little and said, "You must be unhappy to say such a thing. Is there anything I can do?"

For a moment, Claire felt like laughing. It *was* a ridiculous situation. Here was an animated

carpet-sweeper, dish-washer, furniture-polisher, general factotum, rising from the factory table—and offering his services as console and confidant.

Yet she said suddenly, in a burst of woe and voice, "Mr. Belmont doesn't think I have a brain, if you must know—And I suppose I haven't." She couldn't cry in front of him. She felt, for some reason, that she had the honor of the human race to support against this mere creation.

"It's lately," she added. "It was all right when he was a student; when he was just starting. But I can't be a big man's wife; and he's getting to be a big man. He wants me to be a hostess and an entry into social life for him—Like G—guh—guh—Gladys Claffern."

Her nose was red, and she looked away.

But Tony wasn't watching her. His eyes wandered about the room, "I can help you run the house."

"But it's no good," she said, fiercely. "It needs a touch I can't give it. I can only make it comfortable; I can't ever make it the kind they take pictures of for the Home Beautiful magazines."

"Do you want that kind?"

"Does it do any good—wanting?"

Tony's eyes were on her, full. "I could help."

"Do you know anything about

interior decoration?"

"Is it something a good housekeeper should know?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I have the potentialities of learning it. Can you get me books on the subject?"

Something started then.

Claire, clutching her hat against the brawling liberties of the wind, had manipulated two fat volumes on the home arts back from the public library. She watched Tony as he opened one of them and flipped the pages. It was the first time she had watched his fingers flicker at anything resembling fine work.

I don't see how they do it, she thought, and on a sudden impulse reached for his hand and pulled it toward herself. Tony did not resist, but let it lie limp for inspection.

She said, "It's remarkable. Even your finger nails look natural."

"That's deliberate, of course," said Tony. Then, chattily, "The skin is a flexible plastic, and the skeletal framework is a light metal alloy. Does that amuse you?"

"Oh, no," she lifted her reddened face. "I just feel a little embarrassed at sort of poking into your insides. It's none of my business. You don't ask me about mine."

"My brain-paths don't include that type of curiosity. I can only

act within my limitations —"

And Claire felt something tighten inside her in the silence that followed. Why did she keep forgetting he was a machine? Now the thing itself had to remind her. Was she so starved for sympathy that she would even accept a robot as equal — because he sympathized?

She noticed Tony was still flipping the pages, — almost helplessly, — and there was a quick, shooting sense of relieved superiority within her, "You can't read, can you?"

Tony looked up at her, his voice calm, unrepentant, "*I am reading, Mrs. Belmont.*"

"But—" She pointed at the book in a meaningless gesture.

"I am scanning the pages, if that's what you mean. My sense of reading is photographic."

It was evening then, and when Claire eventually went to bed, Tony was well into the second volume, sitting there in the dark, or what seemed dark to Claire's limited eyes.

Her last thought, the one that clamored at her just as her mind let go and tumbled, was a queer one. She remembered his hand again; the touch of it. It had been warm and soft, like a human being's.

How clever of the factory, she thought, and softly ebbed to sleep.

It was the library continuously,

thereafter, for several days. Tony suggested the fields of study, which branched out quickly. There were books on color-matching and on cosmetics; on carpentry and on fashions; on art and on the history of costumes.

He turned the pages of each book before his solemn eyes, and, as quickly as he turned, he read; nor did he seem capable of forgetting.

Before the end of the week, he had insisted on cutting her hair, introducing her to a new method of arranging it, adjusting her eyebrow line a bit, and changing the shade of her powder and lipstick.

She had palpitated in nervous dread for half an hour under the delicate touch of his inhuman fingers and then looked in the mirror.

"There is more that can be done," said Tony, "especially in clothes. How do you find it for a beginning?"

And she hadn't answered; not for quite a while. Not until she had absorbed the identity of the stranger in the glass and cooled the wonder at the beauty of it all. Then she had said, chokingly, never once taking her eyes away from the warming image, "Yes, Tony, quite good, — for a beginning."

She said nothing of this in her letters to Larry. Let him see it all at once. And something in her

realized that it wasn't only the surprise she would enjoy. It was going to be a kind of revenge.

Tony said one morning, "It's time to start buying, and I'm not allowed to leave the house. If I write out exactly what we must have, can I trust you to get it? We need drapery, and furniture fabric, wallpaper, carpeting, paint, clothing, — and any number of small things."

"You can't get these things to your own specifications at a stroke's notice," said Claire, doubtfully.

"You can get fairly close, if you go through the city, and if money is no object."

"But, Tony, money is certainly an object."

"Not at all. Stop off at U.S. Robots in the first place. I'll write a note for you. You see Dr. Calvin, and tell her that I said it was part of the experiment."

Dr. Calvin, somehow, didn't frighten her as on that first evening. With her new face and a new hat, she couldn't be quite the old Claire. The psychologist listened carefully, asked a few questions, nodded — and then Claire found herself walking out, armed with an unlimited charge account against the assets of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation.

It is wonderful what money will do. With a store's contents at her feet, a sales lady's dictum was not necessarily a voice from above; the uplifted eyebrow of a decorator was not anything like Jove's thunder.

And once, when an Exalted Plumpness at one of the most lordly of the garment salons had insistently poohed her description of the wardrobe she must have with counter-pronouncements in accents of the purest 57th Street-French, she called up Tony, then held the phone out to Monsieur.

"If you don't mind," — voice firm, but fingers twisting a bit, "I'd like you to talk to my — uh — secretary."

Pudgy proceeded to the phone with a solemn arm crooked behind his back. He lifted the phone in two fingers and said delicately, "Yes." A short pause, another, "Yes", then a much longer pause, a squeaky beginning of an objection that perished quickly, another pause, a very meek, "Yes," and the phone was restored to its cradle.

"If Madam will come with me," he said, hurt and distant, "I will try to supply her needs."

"Just a second." Claire rushed back to the phone, and dialed again, "— Hello, Tony. I don't know what you said, but it

worked. Thanks. You're a —" She struggled for the appropriate word, gave up, and ended in a final little squeak, "— a — a dear!"

It was Gladys Claflern looking at her when she turned from the phone again. A slightly amused and slightly amazed Gladys Claflern, looking at her out of a face tilted a bit to one side.

"Mrs. Belmont?"

It all drained out of Claire — just like that. She could only nod; — stupidly, like a marionette.

Gladys smiled with an insolence you couldn't put your finger on, "I didn't know you shopped here?" — as if the place had, in her eyes, definitely lost caste through the fact.

"I don't, usually," said Claire, humbly.

"And haven't you done something to your hair? It's quite — quaint — Oh, I hope you'll excuse me, but isn't your husband's name, Lawrence? It seems to me that it's Lawrence."

Claire's teeth clenched, but she had to explain. She *had* to. "Tony is a friend of my husband's. He's helping me select some things."

"I understand. And quite a *dear* about it, I imagine." She passed on smiling, carrying the light and the warmth of the world with her.

Claire did not question the fact

that it was to Tony that she turned for consolation. Ten days had cured her of reluctance. And she could weep before him; weep and rage.

"I was a complete f — fool," she stormed, wrenching at her water-logged handkerchief. "She does that to me. I don't know why. She just does. I should have — kicked her. I should have knocked her down and stamped on her."

"Can you hate a human being so much?" asked Tony, in puzzled softness. "That part of a human mind is closed to me."

"Oh, it isn't she," she moaned. "It's myself, I suppose. She's everything I want to be — on the outside, anyway. — And I can't be."

Tony's voice was forceful and low in her ear, "You can be, Mrs. Belmont. You *can* be. We have ten days yet, and in ten days the house will no longer be itself. Haven't we been planning that?"

"And how will that help me with her?"

"Invite her here. Invite her friends. Have it the evening before I — before I leave. It will be a house-warming, in a way."

"She won't come."

"Yes, she will. She'll come to laugh. And she won't be able to."

"Do you really think so? Oh, Tony, do you think we can do it?" She had both his hands in hers.

And then, with her face flung aside, "But what good would it be? It won't be I; it will be you that's doing it. I can't ride your back."

"Nobody lives in splendid singleness," whispered Tony. "They've put that knowledge in me. What you, or anyone, see in Gladys Claffern is not just Gladys Claffern. She rides the backs of all that money and social position can bring. She doesn't question that. Why should you? — And look at it this way, Mrs. Belmont. I am manufactured to obey, but the extent of my obedience is for myself to determine. I can follow orders niggardly or liberally. For you, it is liberal, because you are what I have been manufactured to see human beings as. You are kind, friendly, unassuming. Mrs. Claffern, as you describe her, is not, and I wouldn't obey her as I would you. So it *is* you, and not I, Mrs. Belmont, that is doing all this."

He withdrew his hands from hers then, and Claire looked at that expressionless face no one could read, — wondering. She was suddenly frightened again in a completely new way.

She swallowed nervously and stared at her hands, which were still tingling with the pressure of his fingers. She hadn't imagined it; his fingers had pressed hers, gently, tenderly, just before they moved away.

No!

Its fingers— Its fingers—

She ran to the bathroom and scrubbed her hands, blindly, uselessly.

She was a bit shy of him the next day; watching him narrowly; waiting to see what might follow. For a while, nothing did.

Tony was working. If there was any difficulty in technique in putting up wall paper, or utilizing the quick-drying paint, Tony's actions did not show it. His hands moved precisely; his fingers were deft and sure.

He worked all night. She never heard him, but each morning was a new adventure. She couldn't count the number of things that had been done, and by evening she was still finding new touches — and another night had come.

She tried to help only once and her human clumsiness marred that. He was in the next room, and she was hanging a picture in the spot marked by Tony's mathematical eyes. The little mark was there; the picture was there; and a revulsion against idleness was there.

But she was nervous, or the ladder was rickety. It didn't matter. She felt it going, and she cried out. It tumbled without her, for Tony, with far more than flesh-and-blood quickness had been under her.

His calm, dark eyes said nothing at all, and his warm voice said only words, "Are you hurt, Mrs. Belmont?"

She noticed for an instant, that her falling hand must have missed that sleek hair of his, because for the first time, she could see for herself that it was composed of distinct strands, — fine black hairs.

And then, all at once, she was conscious of his arms about her shoulders and under her knees, — holding her tightly and warmly.

She pushed, and her scream was loud in her own ears. She spent the rest of the day in her room, and thereafter she slept with a chair upended against the doorknob of her bedroom door.

She had sent out the invitations, and, as Tony had said, they were accepted. She had only to wait for the last evening.

It came, too, after the rest of them, in its proper place. The house was scarcely her own. She went through it one last time — and every room had been changed. She, herself, was in clothes she would never have dared wear before. And when you put them on, you put on pride and confidence with them.

She tried a polite look of contemptuous amusement before the mirror, and the mirror sneered back at her masterfully.

What would Larry say? It didn't matter, somehow. The exciting days weren't coming with him. They were leaving with Tony. Now wasn't that strange? She tried to recapture her mood of three weeks before and failed completely.

The clock shrieked eight at her in as many breathless installments, and she turned to Tony. "They'll be here soon, Tony. You'd better get into the basement. We can't let them —"

She stared a moment, then said weakly, "Tony?" and more strongly, "Tony?", and nearly a scream, "Tony!"

But his arms were around her now; his face was close to hers; the pressure of his embrace was relentless. She heard his voice through a haze of emotional jumble.

"Claire," the voice said, "there are many things I am not made to understand, and this must be one of them. I am leaving tomorrow, and I don't want to. I find that there is more in me than just a desire to please you. Isn't it strange?"

His face was closer; his lips were warm, but with no breath behind them—for machines do not breathe. They were almost on hers.

And the bell sounded.

For a moment, she struggled breathlessly, and then he was gone and nowhere in sight, and

the bell was sounding again. Its intermittent shrillness was insistent.

The curtains on the front windows had been pulled open. They had been closed fifteen minutes earlier. She *knew* that.

They must have seen them. They must *all* have seen, — everything!

They came in so politely, all in a bunch — the pack come to howl — with their sharp, darting eyes piercing everywhere. They *had* seen. Why else would Gladys ask in her jabbingest manner after Larry? And Claire was spurred to a desperate and reckless defiance.

Yes, he *is* away. He'll be back tomorrow, I suppose. No, I haven't been lonely here myself. Not a bit. I've had an exciting time. And she laughed at them. Why not? What could they do? Larry would know the truth, if it ever came to him, the story of what they thought they saw.

But *they* didn't laugh.

She could read that in the fury in Gladys Claflern's eyes; in the false sparkle of her words; in her desire to leave early. And as she parted with them, she caught one last, anonymous whisper — disjointed.

" — never saw anything like — — so *handsome* — "

And she knew what it was that had enabled her to finger-snap

them so. Let each cat mew; and let each cat know — that she might be prettier than Claire Belmont, and grander, and richer — but not one, *not one*, could have as handsome a lover!

And then she remembered again — again — again, that Tony was a machine, and her skin crawled.

"Go away! Leave me be!" she cried to the empty room and ran to her bed. She wept wakefully all that night and the next morning, almost before dawn, when the streets were empty, a car drew up to the house and took Tony away.

Lawrence Belmont passed Dr. Calvin's office, and, on impulse, knocked. He found her with mathematician Peter Bogert, but did not hesitate on that account.

He said, "Claire tells me that U.S. Robots paid for all that was done at my house —"

"Yes," said Dr. Calvin. "We've written it off, as a valuable and necessary part of the experiment. With your new position as Associate Engineer, you'll be able to keep it up, I think."

"That's not what I'm worried about. With Washington agreeing to the tests, we'll be able to get a TN model of our own by next year, I think." He turned hesitantly, as though to go, and as hesitantly turned back again.

"Well, Mr. Belmont?" asked

Dr. Calvin, after a pause.

"I wonder —" began Larry, "I wonder what really happened there. She — Claire, I mean, — seems so different. It's not just her looks — though, frankly, I'm amazed." He laughed nervously, "It's *her*! She's not my wife, really — I can't explain it."

"Why try? Are you disappointed with any part of the change?"

"On the contrary. But it's a little frightening, too, you see —"

"I wouldn't worry, Mr. Belmont. Your wife has handled herself very well. Frankly, I never expected to have the experiment yield such a thorough and complete test. We know exactly what corrections must be made in the TN model, and the credit belongs entirely to Mrs. Belmont. If you want me to be very honest, I think your wife deserves your promotion more than you do."

Larry flinched visibly at that, "As long as it's in the family," he murmured unconvincingly and left.

Susan Calvin looked after him, "I think that hurt — I hope. — Have you read Tony's report, Peter?"

"Thoroughly," said Bogert, "And won't the TN-3 model need changes!"

"Oh, you think so, too?" questioned Calvin, sharply. "What's your reasoning?"

Bogert frowned, "I don't need

any. It's obvious on the face of it, that we can't have a robot loose which makes love to his mistress, if you don't mind the pun."

"Love! Peter, you sicken me. You really don't understand? That machine had to obey the First Law. He couldn't allow harm to come to a human being, and harm was coming to Claire Belmont through her own sense of inadequacy. So he made love to her, since what woman would fail to appreciate the compliment of being able to stir passion in a machine — in a cold, soul-less machine. And he opened the curtains that night deliberately, that the others might see, and envy — without any risk possible to Claire's marriage. I think it was

clever of Tony —"

"Do you? What's the difference whether it was pretense or not, Susan? It still has its horrifying effect. Read the report again. She avoided him. She screamed when he held her. She didn't sleep that last night — in hysterics. We can't have that."

"Peter, you're blind. You're as blind as I was. The TN model will be rebuilt entirely, but not for your reason. Quite otherwise; quite otherwise. Strange that I overlooked it in the first place," her eyes were opaquely thoughtful, "but perhaps it reflects a shortcoming in myself. You see, Peter, machines can't fall in love, but — even when it's hopeless and horrifying — women can!"

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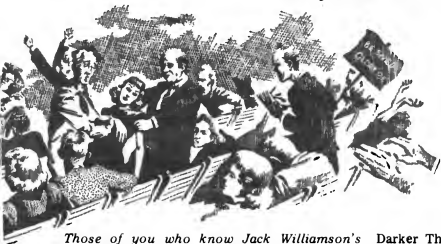


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SATAN SENDS FLOWERS

By HENRY KUTTNER



*Those of you who know Jack Williamson's **Darker Than You Think** or James Blish's **There Shall Be No Darkness**—both of them dazzling variations on the theme of lycanthropy—will probably go for the Kuttner fantasy that follows. This one, of course—unlike the other two—isn't about werewolfism. But—very much like them—it does show how a master (in collaboration with his wife C.L. Moore) could blend touches of science-fictional thinking into a fantasy plot almost as old as Adam—and come up with a gem still as polished now as on the day twin artists made it not so long ago.*

THE devil smiled uneasily at James Fenwick. "It's very irregular," he said. "I'm not sure—"

"Do you want my soul or not?" James Fenwick demanded.

"Naturally I do," the devil

said. "But I'll have to think this over. Under the circumstances, I don't see how I could collect."

"All I want is immortality," Fenwick said with a pleased smile.

"I wonder why no one has ever

thought of this before. In my opinion it's foolproof. Come, do you want to back out?"

"Oh no," the devil said hastily. "It's just that — look here, Fenwick. I'm not sure you realize — immortality's a long time, you know."

"Exactly. The question is, will it ever have an end. If it does, you collect my soul. If not —" Fenwick made an airy gesture. "I win," he said.

"Oh, it has an end," the devil said, somewhat grimly. "It's just that right now I'd rather not undertake such a long-term investment. You wouldn't care for immortality, Fenwick. Believe me."

Fenwick said, "Ha."

"I don't see why you're so set on immortality," the devil said a little peevishly, tapping the point of his tail on the carpet.

"I'm not," Fenwick told him. "Actually, it's just a by-product. There happen to be quite a number of things I'd like to do without suffering the consequences, but —"

"I could promise you that," the devil put in eagerly.

"But," Fenwick said, lifting his hand for quiet, "the deal would obviously end right there. Played this way, I get not only an unlimited supply of immunities of all kinds, but I get immortality besides. Take it or leave it, my friend."

The devil rose from his chair and began to pace up and down

the room, scowling at the carpet. Finally he looked up. "Very well," he said briskly. "I accept."

"You do?" Fenwick was aware of a slight sinking feeling. Now that it actually came to the point, maybe . . . He looked uneasily toward the drawn blinds of his apartment. "How will you go about it?" he asked.

"Biochemically," the devil said. Now that he had made up his mind, he seemed quite confident. "And with quantum mechanics. Aside from the internal regenerative functions, some space-time alterations will have to be made. You'll become independent of your external environment. Environment is often fatal."

"I'll stay right here, though? Visible, tangible — no tricks?"

"Tricks?" The devil looked wounded. "If there's any trickery, it seems to me you're the offender. No indeed, Fenwick. You'll get value received for your investment. I promise that. You'll become a closed system, like Achilles. Except for the heel. There **will** have to be a vulnerable point, **you** see."

"No," Fenwick said quickly. "I won't accept that."

"It can't be helped, I'm afraid. You'll be quite safe inside the closed system from anything outside. And there'll be nothing inside except you. It is you. In a way this is in your own interest." The devil's tail lashed upon the carpet.

Fenwick regarded it uneasily. "If you wish to put an end to your own life eventually," the devil went on, "I can't protect you against that. Consider, however, that in a few million years you may wish to die."

"That reminds me," Fenwick said. "Tithonus. I'll keep my youth, health, present appearance, all my faculties —"

"Naturally, naturally. I'm not interested in tricking you over terms. What I had in mind was the possibility that boredom might set in."

"Are you bored?"

"I have been, in my time," the devil admitted.

"You're immortal?"

"Of course."

"Then why haven't you killed yourself? Or couldn't you?"

"I could," the devil said bleakly. "I did. . . . Now, the terms of our contract. Immortality, youth, health, etc., etc., invulnerability with the single exception of suicide. In return for this service, I shall possess your soul at death."

"Why?" Fenwick asked with sudden curiosity.

The devil looked at him somberly. "In your fall, and in the fall of every soul, I forget my own for a moment." He made an impatient gesture. "This is quibbling. Here." He plucked out of empty air a parchment scroll and a quill pen.

"Our agreement," the devil said.

Fenwick read the scroll carefully. At one point he looked up.

"What's this?" he asked. "I didn't know I was supposed to put up surety."

"I will naturally want some kind of bond," the devil said. "Unless you can find a co-guarantor?"

"I'm sure I couldn't," Fenwick said. "Not even in the death house. Well, what kind of security do you want?"

"Certain of your memories of the past," the devil said. "All of them unconscious, as it happens."

Fenwick considered. "I'm thinking about amnesia. I need my memories."

"Not these. Amnesia is concerned with conscious memories. You will never know the structure I want is missing."

"Is it — the soul?"

"No," the devil said calmly. "It is a necessary part of the soul, of course, or it would be of no value to me. But you will keep the essentials until you choose to surrender them to me at death. I will then combine the two and take possession of your soul. But that will no doubt be a long time from now, and in the meantime you will suffer no inconvenience."

"If I write that into the contract, will you sign?"

The devil nodded.

Fenwick scribbled in the margin and then signed his name with the

wet red point of the quill. "Here," he said.

The devil, with a tolerant air, added his name. He then waved the scroll into emptiness.

"Very well," he said. "Now stand up, please. Some glandular readjustment is necessary." His hands sank into Fenwick's breast painlessly, and moved swiftly here and there. "The thyroid . . . and the other endocrines . . . can be reset to regenerate your body indefinitely. Turn around, please."

In the mirror over the fireplace Fenwick saw his red visitor's hand sink softly into the back of Fenwick's head. He felt a sudden dizziness.

"Thalamus and pineal," the devil murmured. "The space-time cognition is subjective . . . and now you're independent of your external environment. One moment, now. There's another slight . . ."

His wrist twisted suddenly and he drew his closed hand out of Fenwick's head. At the same time Fenwick felt a strange, sudden elation.

"What did you do then?" he asked, turning.

No one stood behind him. The apartment was quite empty. The devil had disappeared.

It could, of course, have been a dream. Fenwick had anticipated this possible skepticism after the event. Hallucinations could occur.

He thought he was immortal and invulnerable now. But this is, by common standards, a psychotic delusion. He had no proof.

But he had no doubt, either. Immortality, he thought, is something tangible. An inward feeling of infinite well-being. That glandular readjustment, he thought. My body is functioning now as it never did before, as no one's ever did. I am a self-regenerating, closed system which nothing can injure, not even time.

A curious, welling happiness possessed him. He closed his eyes and summoned up the oldest memories he could command. Sunlight on a porch floor, the buzzing of a fly, warmth and a rocking motion. He was aware of no lack. His mind ranged freely, in the past. The rhythmic sway and creak of swings in a playground, the echoing stillness of a church. A piano-box club-house. The roughness of a washcloth scrubbing his face, and his mother's voice. . . .

Invulnerable, immortal, Fenwick crossed the room, opened a door and went down a short hallway. He walked with a sense of wonderful lightness, of pure pleasure in being alive. He opened a second door quietly and looked in. His mother lay in bed asleep, propped on a heap of pillows.

Fenwick felt very happy.

He moved softly forward, skirting the wheel-chair by the bed, and stood looking down. Then he

tugged a pillow gently free and lifted it in both hands, to lower it again, slowly at first, toward his mother's face.

Since this is not the chronicle of James Fenwick's sins, it is clearly not necessary to detail the steps by which he arrived, within five years, at the title of the Worst Man in the World. Sensational newspapers revelled in him. There were, of course, worse men, but being mortal and vulnerable they were more reticent.

Fenwick's behavior was based on an increasing feeling that he was the only permanent object in a transient world. "Their days are as grass," he mused, watching his fellow Satanists as they crowded around an altar with something unpleasant on it. This was early in his career, when he was exploring pure sensation along traditional lines, later discarded as juvenilia.

Meanwhile, perfectly free, and filled with that enduring, delightful sense of well-being, Fenwick experimented with many aspects of living. He left a trail of hung juries and baffled attorneys behind him. "A modern Caligula!" said the *New York News*, explaining to its readers who Caligula had been, with examples. "Are the shocking charges against James Fenwick true?"

But somehow, he could never quite be convicted. Every charge

fell through. He was, as the devil had assured him, a closed system within his environment, and his independence of the outer world was demonstrated in many a courtroom. Exactly how the devil managed things so efficiently Fenwick could never understand. Very seldom did an actual miracle have to happen.

Once an investment banker, correctly blaming Fenwick for the collapse of his entire fortune, fired five bullets at Fenwick's heart. The bullets ricocheted. The only witnesses were the banker and Fenwick. Theorizing that his unharmed target was wearing a bullet-proof vest, the banker aimed the last bullet at Fenwick's head, with identical results. Later the man tried again, with a knife. Fenwick, who was curious, decided to wait and see what would happen. What happened was that eventually the banker went mad.

Fenwick, who had appropriated his fortune by very direct means, proceeded to increase it. Somehow, he was never convicted of any of the capital charges he incurred. It took a certain technique to make sure that the crimes he committed would always endanger his life if he were arrested for them, but he mastered the method without much difficulty and his wealth and power increased tremendously.

He was certainly notorious. Presently he decided that some-

thing was lacking, and began to crave admiration. It was not so easy to achieve. He did not yet possess enough wealth to transcend the moral judgments of society. That was easily remedied. Ten years after his bargain with the devil, Fenwick was not perhaps the most powerful man in the world, but certainly the most powerful man in the United States. He attained the admiration and the fame he thought he wanted.

And it was not enough. The devil had suggested that in a few million years Fenwick might wish to die, out of sheer boredom. It took only ten years for Fenwick to realize, one summer day, with a little shock of unpleasant surprise, that he did not know what he wanted to do next.

He examined his state of mind with close attention. "Is this boredom?" he asked himself. If so, not even boredom was unpleasant. There was a delightful, sensuous relaxation about it, like floating in a warm summer ocean. In a sense, he was *too* relaxed.

"If this is all there is to immortality," he told himself, "I might as well not have bothered. Pleasant, certainly, but not worth bartering my soul for. There must be things that will rouse me out of this somnolence."

He experimented. The next five years witnessed his meteoric fall from public favor as he tried more

and more frantically to break through that placid calm. He couldn't do it. He got no reaction from even the most horrific situations. What others saw with shock and often with horror had no meaning to Fenwick.

With a sense of smothered desperation under the calm, he saw that he was beginning to lose contact with the race of man. Humans were mortal, and more and more they seemed to recede into a distance less real than the solid earth underfoot. In time, he thought, the earth itself would become less solid, as he watched the slow shifting of the geologic tides.

He turned at last to the realm of the intellect. He took up painting and he dabbled in literature and in some of the sciences. Interesting — up to a point. But always he came before long to a closed door in the mind, beyond which lay only that floating calm which dissolved all interest out of his mind. Something was lacking in him. . . .

The suspicion was slow in forming. It floated almost to the surface and then sank again under the pressure of new experiments. But eventually it broke free into the realm of the conscious.

Early one summer morning Fenwick roused out of a sound sleep and sat straight up in bed as if an invisible hand had pulled him out of slumber.



"Something is missing!" he told himself with great conviction. "But what?" He meditated. "How long has it been gone?" He could not say — at first. The deep, ineradicable calm kept lulling him and it was hard to follow the thought. That calm in itself was part of the trouble. How long had he had it? Obviously, since the day of his pact. What caused it? Well, he had been assuming all these many years that it was simply the physical well-being of perfectly and eternally functioning bodily mechanisms. But what if this were really something more? What if it were an artificially induced dulling of the mind, so that he would not suspect a theft had been committed?

A theft? Sitting up in bed among heavy silk sheets, with the June dawn pale outside the windows, James Fenwick suddenly saw the outrageous truth. He struck his knee a resounding blow under the bedclothes.

"My soul!" he cried to the unheeding dawn. "He swindled me! He stole my soul!"

The moment the idea took shape it seemed so obvious Fenwick could not understand why it had not been clear from the first. The devil had cunningly and most unfairly anticipated the payoff by seizing his soul too soon. And if not all of it, then the most important part. Fenwick had actually stood before the mirror and watched

him do it. The proof seemed obvious. Something was very definitely missing. He seemed to stand always just inside a closed door in the mind that would not open for him because he lacked the essential something, the lost, the stolen soul. . . .

What good was immortality without this mysterious something that gave immortality its savor? He was helpless to enjoy the full potentialities of eternal life because he had been robbed of the very key to living.

"'Certain memories of the past', is it?" he sneered, remembering the devil's casual description of the thing he wanted for surety. "Never miss them, eh? And all the time it was something out of the very middle of my soul!"

Now he remembered episodes out of folklore and mythology, people in legend who had lacked souls. The Little Mermaid, the Seal Maiden, someone or other in *Midsummer Night's Dream* — a standard situation in myth, once you considered the question. And those who lacked the souls always yearned to get one at any cost. Nor was it, Fenwick realized, simply ethnocentric thinking on the part of the author. He was in the unique position of knowing this yearning for a soul to be quite valid.

Now that he was aware of his loss, the queer, crippling inward lack tormented him. It had pre-

sumably tormented the Little Mermaid and others. Like him, they had had immortality. Being extra-human they had probably possessed this curious, light-headed, light-hearted freedom which even now interposed a cushion of partial indifference between Fenwick and his loss. Were not the gods supposed to spend their days in just this simple-minded joy, laughing and singing, dancing and drinking endlessly, never weary, never bored?

Up to a point it was wonderful. But once you began to suspect that something had been removed, you lost your taste for the Olympian life and began at all costs to crave a soul. Why? Fenwick couldn't say. He only *knew*. . . .

At this moment the cool summer dawn shimmered between him and the window, and the devil stood before James Fenwick.

Fenwick shuddered slightly.

"The bargain," he said, "was for eternity."

"Yes," the devil said. "Only you can abrogate it."

"Well, I don't intend to," Fenwick told him sharply. "How did you happen to show up at just this moment?"

"I thought I heard my name called," the devil said. "Did you want to speak to me? I seemed to catch a note of despair in your mind. How do you feel? Bored yet? Ready to end it?"

"Certainly not," Fenwick said. "But if I were, it's because you swindled me. I want a word with you. What was it you took out of my head in your closed hand the day of our pact?"

"I don't care to discuss it," the devil said, lashing his tail slightly.

"Well, I care," Fenwick cried. "You told me it was only a few unimportant memories I'd never miss."

"And so it was," the devil said, grinning.

"It was my soul!" Fenwick said, striking the bedclothes angrily. "You cheated me. You collected my soul in advance, and now I can't enjoy the immortality I bought with it. This is out-and-out breach of contract."

"What seems to be the trouble?" the devil asked.

"There must be a great many things I'd enjoy doing, if I had my soul back," Fenwick said. "I could take up music and become a great musician, if I had my soul. I always liked music, and I have eternity to learn in. Or I could study mathematics. I could learn nuclear physics and, who knows, with all the time and money and knowledge in the world at my command, there's no limit to the things I could achieve. I could even blow up the world and rob you of all future souls. How would you like that?"

The devil laughed politely and polished his talons on his sleeve.

"Don't laugh," Fenwick said. "It's perfectly true. I could study medicine and prolong human life. I could study politics and economics and put an end to wars and suffering. I could study crime and fill up Hell with new converts. I could do anything — if I had my soul back. But without it — well, everything is too — too peaceful." Fenwick's shoulders sagged disconsolately. "I feel cut off from humanity," he said. "Everything I do is blocked. But I'm calm and carefree. I'm not even unhappy.

And yet I don't know what to do next. Nothing is exciting anymore. I —"

"In a word, you're bored," the devil said. "Excuse me if I don't show enough sympathy for your plight."

"In a word, you swindled me," Fenwick said. "I want my soul back."

"I told you exactly what it was I took," the devil said.

"My soul!"

"Not at all," the devil assured him. "I'm afraid I shall have to leave you now."

"Give me back my soul, you swindler!"

"Try and make me do it," the devil said with a broad grin. The first ray of the morning sun shimmered in the cool air of the bedroom, and in the shimmer the devil dissolved and vanished.

"Very well," Fenwick said to the emptiness. "Very well, I will."

He wasted no time about it. Or, at least, no more time than his curious, carefree placidity enforced.

"How can I bring pressure on the dev-



"Read any bad books lately?"

il?" he asked himself. "By blocking him in some way? I don't see how. Well, then, by depriving him of something he values? What does he value? Souls. All souls. *My soul.* Hm-m-m." He frowned pensively. "I could," he reflected, "repent. . . ."

Fenwick thought all day about it. The idea tempted him, and yet of course in a way it was self-defeating. The consequences were unpredictable. Besides, he was not sure how to go about it. To undertake a lifetime of good deeds seemed so boring.

In the evening he went out alone and walked at twilight through the streets, thinking deeply. The people he passed were like transient shadows reflected on the screen of time. They had no significance. The air was sweet and calm, and if it had not been for this sense of nagging injustice, the aimless inability to use the immortality he had paid so highly for, he would have felt entirely at peace.

Presently the sound of music penetrated his rapt senses and he looked up to find himself outside the portals of a great cathedral. Shadowy people went up and down the steps. From within deep organ music rolled, the sound of singing emerged, occasional waves of incense were sweet on the air. It was most impressive.

Fenwick thought, "I could go up and embrace the altar and

shout out my repentance." He put his foot on the bottom step, but then he hesitated and felt that he could not face it. The cathedral was too impressive. He would feel like such a fool. And yet —

He walked on, undecided. He walked a long way.

Again the sound of music interrupted his thinking. This time he was passing a vacant lot upon which a large revival tent had been pitched. There was a great deal of noise coming out of it. Music pounded wildly through the canvas walls. Men and women were singing and shouting inside.

Fenwick paused, struck by hope. Here at least he could do his repenting without attracting more than a passing glance. He hesitated briefly and then went in.

It was very noisy, crowded and confused inside. But before Fenwick an aisle stretched between benches toward an altar, of sorts, with several highly excited people clustered under the uplifted arms of an even more highly excited speaker in an improvised pulpit.

Fenwick started down the aisle.

"How should I phrase this?" he wondered, walking slowly. "Just 'I repent'? Is that enough? Or something like, 'I have sold my soul to the devil and I hereby repudiate the bargain?' Are legal terms necessary?"

He had almost reached the altar when the air shimmered before

him and the crimson outlines of the devil appeared very faintly, a mere three-dimensional sketch upon the dusty air.

"I wouldn't do this if I were you," the pale image said.

Fenwick sneered and walked through him.

At this the devil pulled himself together and appeared in full form and color in the aisle, blocking Fenwick's way.

"I wish you wouldn't create scenes like this," the devil said pettishly. "I can't tell you how uncomfortable I feel here. Kindly don't be a fool, Fenwick."

Several people in the crowd cast curious glances at the devil, but no one seemed unduly interested. Most probably thought him a costumed attendant, and those who knew him for what he was may have been accustomed to the sight, or perhaps they expected some such apparition in such a place at such a time. There was no disturbance.

"Out of my way," Fenwick said. "My mind is made up."

"You're cheating," the devil complained. "I can't allow it."

"You cheated," Fenwick reminded him. "Try and stop me."

"I will," the devil said, and reached out both taloned hands.

Fenwick laughed. "I am a system enclosed within itself," he said. "You can't harm me, remember?"

The devil gnashed his teeth.

Fenwick brushed the crimson form aside and went on.

Behind him the devil said, "Oh, very well, Fenwick. You win."

Relieved, Fenwick turned. "Will you give me back my soul?"

"I'll give you back what I took as surety," the devil said, "but you won't like it."

"Hand it over," Fenwick said. "I don't believe a word you say."

"I am the father of lies," the devil said, "but this time —"

"Never mind," Fenwick said. "Just give me back my soul."

"Not here. I find this very uncomfortable," the devil told him. "Come with me. Don't cringe like that, I merely want to take you to your apartment. We need privacy."

He lifted his crimson hands and sketched a wall around himself and Fenwick. Immediately the pushing crowds, the shouting and tumult faded and the walls of Fenwick's sumptuous apartment rose around them. Slightly breathless, Fenwick crossed the familiar floor and looked out the window. He was indubitably at home again.

"That was clever," he congratulated the devil. "Now give me back my soul."

"I will give you back the part of it I removed," the devil said. "It was not in violation of the contract, but a bargain is a bargain. I think it only fair to warn you, however, that you won't like it."

"No shilly-shallying," Fenwick said. "I don't expect you to admit you cheated."

"You are warned," the devil said.

"Hand it over."

The devil shrugged. He then put his hand into his own chest, groped for a moment, murmuring, "I put it away for safekeeping," and withdrew his closed fist. "Turn around," he said. Fenwick did so. He felt a cool breeze pass through his head from the back. . . .

"Stand still," the devil said from behind him. "This will take a moment or two. You are a fool, you know. I expected better entertainment, or I'd never have troubled myself to go through this farce. My poor stupid friend, it was not your soul I took. It was merely certain unconscious memories, as I said all along."

"Then why," Fenwick demanded, "am I unable to enjoy my immortality? What is it that stops me at the threshold of everything I attempt? I'm tired of living like a god if I have to stop with immortality only, and no real pleasure in it."

"Hold still," the devil said. "There. My dear Fenwick, you are not a god. You're a very limited mortal man. Your own limitations are all that stand in your way. In a million years you could never become a great musician or a great economist or any of the greats you dream of. It simply

isn't in you. Immortality has nothing to do with it. Oddly enough . . ." And here the devil sighed. "Oddly enough, those who make bargains with me never do have the capability to use their gifts. I suppose only inferior minds expect to get something for nothing. Yours is distinctly inferior."

The cool breeze ceased.

"There you are," the devil said. "I have now returned what I took. It was, in Freudian terms, simply your superego."

"Superego?" Fenwick echoed, turning. "I don't quite —"

"Understand?" the devil finished for him, suddenly smiling broadly. "You will. It is the structure of early learning built up in your unconscious mind. It guides your impulses into channels acceptable to society. In a word, my poor Fenwick, I have just restored your conscience. Why did you think you felt so light and carefree without it?"

Fenwick drew breath to reply, but it was too late.

The devil had vanished. He stood alone in the room.

Well, no, not entirely alone. There was a mirror over the fireplace and in the mirror he met his own appalled eyes in the instant the superego took up again the interrupted function of the conscience.

A terrible, smashing awareness

struck down upon Fenwick like the hand of a punishing God. He knew now what he had done. He remembered his crimes.

His knees buckled under him. The world turned dark and roared in his ears. Guilt was a burden he could hardly stagger under. The images of the things he had seen and done in the years of his care-free evil were thunder and lightning that shook the brain in his

skull. Intolerable anguish roared through his mind and he struck his hands to his eyes to blot out vision, but he could not blot out memory.

Staggering, he turned and stumbled toward his bedroom door. He tore it open, reeled across the room and reached into a bureau drawer. He took out a revolver.

He lifted the revolver, and the devil came in.

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be touched, could not be reached. And the dream was real. It could hurt you and did.

Some days, in open forest, they did very well. They covered as much as ten miles before they stopped. Other days, when the jungle closed in around them, they barely made it from one circle of leaves to another. Twice, they had to cross rivers—great sluggish streams that wound like snakes through shallow canyons. The man-things could not swim. They shoved floating logs into the water, clustered on them, and kicked their way from one bank to the other. For the men, they made rafts, lashing logs together with ropes. They had never made a raft before, but they got the idea very quickly. They knew the basic principle. They could apply it.

The men kept going, somehow. They were filthy and ragged. Their beards were tangled horrors that were alive with insects. Their eyes were red and sunken. But their feet toughened, their muscles hardened—

They kept going.

In time, they dared to hope.

And one day—still hundreds of miles from home plate—they heard a sound in the sky.

They stared at each other, afraid to believe. They broke into a run, yelling like maniacs. They ran, ran out of the forest, out

of the vines and the towering trees and the flower-spoltched shadows. They ran, heedless of thorns that stabbed them, brush that whipped their mottled legs. They ran out into the grass with the blue sky over their heads. They didn't pause to look for the big cats; they would have run right through them.

They fired off their flares.

They danced and waved and shouted.

For a long minute, a desperate minute—nothing.

Then the sound in the sky grew louder.

They saw the plane.

The plane circled, copter blades flashing in the sun.

It came down to get them.

When Alston woke up, he did not know where he was.

Something soft and yielding was beneath him, but it was not a nest. Something covered his body with a feather-touch. The air was strangely silent except for a subdued humming noise. He was still, so very still. There was no swaying. He listened, but he could not hear the wind or the rustling of leaves.

Startled, he opened his eyes. He was in a room, a white room. The white room had a window and a door. A bed was under him, he had a white sheet pulled up across his shoulders. His body felt clean, clean and rested. He

saw red flowers in a vase on a small table.

He knew where he was now. He was in the base hospital. He had been there for many days.

He closed his eyes again. His memory came back.

He remembered—

Remembered the shocked expressions on the faces of the men in the plane. Expressions! They had been wonderful to see. He remembered the wild, half-coherent story that he and Tony had tried to tell. Remembered the fantastic feeling of flight, remembered looking down from that plane at the green sea of the tree-tops, seeing no sign of life there, knowing that *they* were there, asleep in their nests . . .

Remembered the landing at home plate, the injections, the questions. Endless questions! Interviews, analysis, reports to write, forms to be filled out, notes to be dictated.

It wasn't easy to come back from the dead.

The search for them had been long abandoned. They had been far off course when the storm had struck their plane. The automatic beam signals had failed. The plane itself had never been found.

But he *had* come back. He and Tony had returned with a story that would change the history of a planet, but at first that had mattered very little to Alston. There were other things that were more

important to a man who had come back from the dead. He saw everything with fresh eyes. He rejoiced in little things: the taste of cooked meat, a day without rain striking his body, a shave, the crisp feel of clean clothing. Tobacco was a joy, the sight of a woman almost an ecstasy. An air-conditioned building was a miracle, and man himself was new.

He could not forget for long, however.

He remembered other things. Great yellow eyes that gleamed in the dark, strong hairy arms that kept him from falling, tails that curled over faraway branches. Smells that carried secrets he could not share, fingers that could tie clever knots, minds that were as quick as his own. He had not been able to thank them for what they had done, but he knew that they wanted no thanks from him. They had accomplished their purpose. He was alive. He had told their story.

He remembered. And, like the man-things, he looked ahead.

Alston knew what was going to happen, knew it as certainly as though he had experienced it already.

The report on the discovery of the man-things would go back to UNECA—indeed, it was already on its way. There would be a flap to end all flaps. There would be speeches, excited editorials, conferences, a thousand commit-

tee meetings. It would all take time, but the final decision was inevitable.

Was not Pollux Five a twin of Earth?

Sure it was! There were only a few minor differences, here and there . . .

Man needed those earthlike planets. They were the ultimate reason for the costly exploration of interstellar space. They were the goal. Such a world would not be abandoned easily. plain old-fashioned necessity had a way of slicing through even the thickest rhetoric.

And the man-things?

Well, there would be more survey teams sent out. Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists—it would keep them busy for years. But their conclusions were already obvious. Legally, the man-things were "manlike beings." They could handle symbols, they had a culture, they had a language, they were capable of rational thought. They were even primates. The law made no special provisions for arboreal or nocturnal life-forms. What difference did that make?

Welcome brothers!

So, by definition, Pollux Five became an inhabited world. The rest followed like clockwork.

The culture—or cultures—of the man-things did not occupy the whole planet. They were restricted to the rain forests, and

did not in fact take up all of them. Therefore, the rest of the world—the vast open grasslands—was open to human settlement or use. There was no question of colonialism here. Man would come to Pollux Five, and come to stay.

The man-things, certainly, would be left pretty much alone. Their cultures, according to the usual criteria, were primitive. They might not be able to understand a treaty, which meant an automatic hands-off policy for their territories. Even if they could understand a treaty—and Alston would not have been at all surprised at that—they would not be much disturbed. Man could not live in the trees. There was plenty of room without advancing into the rain forests.

And that meant—

Alston managed a grim little smile. He understood the man-things better now. He knew why they had gone to such lengths to help him.

Look at it from their point of view. The men had come in their great ships to Pollux Five. They had established a base. They had started to explore the world.

And what had they done, from the very beginning?

They had shot out the big cats around the settlement.

Where man lived, the big cats died.

The man-things were quite ca-

pable of putting two and two together. They were smart. More than that, they took the long view, the view of millenia.

They could not have known all the details, of course. But they knew enough. They knew that their only enemies would be destroyed by the men from the ships. They knew that the men could not live in the trees, so their home territories were safe. They could not lose. And if, in time, they could learn to deal with the men—

Oh, they wanted to help.

They did everything in their power to get the lost men home again. They fed them, sheltered them, watched over them. They let them do as they wished, so long as they did not threaten the forest where they lived. They were willing to take risks, but they were not stupid. They did not try to carry a message to the men with guns. They knew that such men could be dangerous.

It was because men *were* dangerous that they welcomed them.

It took dangerous men to kill the big cats.

They wanted to keep the men around.

The more the merrier.

The man-things were patient. They knew how to wait.

Alston looked at the window. It was getting dark outside.

He shivered. It would take more

than a sheet to get him warm again.

The ancestors of man, too, had once come down out of the trees. They hadn't been as formidable then as the man-things were now. Man had come down to the ground and he had—exploded.

What would the man-things do, given the chance?

And they *would* be given the chance. In a matter of years, there would be no big cats left except in the game parks.

There would only be men.

Alston knew, intellectually, that it could be a wonderful thing. A partnership, conceivably. Friends, allies—

But in his guts he doubted it.

The word was *rival*.

Welcome, brother!

Alston sensed the great world outside, that world of grasslands and cats, tall trees and staring yellow eyes.

A twin of Earth, yes.

And a twin of man.

A dark twin.

A primitive twin, perhaps, an infant twin, but a twin that could plan across the centuries.

It would not happen in the light of the sun. No, they would move always in the shadows of the night. They would come down out of the nests that had shielded them for so long, come down to the land that had been denied them.

Alston remembered the lulla-

by, the lullaby that would never again soothe, the lullaby that haunted him—

"Rock-a-bye baby, in the tree top.

"When the wind blows the cradle will rock.

"When the bough breaks the cradle will fall:

"And down will come baby,

cradle and all."

He got out of bed and went to the window. He looked out over the gleaming lights of the settlement, looked out beyond the lights, out into that other world, the world of darkness.

Out there in the night, baby was waiting.

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THE WAY HOME



Ever hear the one about the little boy who ran away from home but couldn't get very far because he wasn't allowed to cross the street?—Well, even if you didn't, we're sure of one thing at any rate—that even though you may forget the joke that starts off this blurb, you'll probably never forget the brilliant Sturgeon story that follows it.

WHEN Paul ran away from home, he met no one and saw nothing all the way to the highway. The highway swept sudden and wide from the turn by Keeper's Rise, past the blunt end of the Township Road, and narrowed off to a distant pinpoint pricking at the horizon. After a time Paul could see the car.

It was new and long and it threw down its snout a little as the driver braked, and when it stopped beside him it seesawed easily, once, on its big soft springs.

The driver was a large man, large and costly, with a grey Stetson and a dove-colored topcoat made of something that did not crease in the bend of his arms but rolled and folded instead. The woman beside him had a broad brow and a pointed chin. Her skin had peach shadings, but was deeply tanned, and her hair was

the red gold called "straw color" by a smith as he watches his forge. She smiled at the man and she smiled at Paul almost the same way.

"Hi, son," the man said. "This the old Township Road?"

"Yes sir," said Paul, "it sure is."

"Figured it was," said the man. "A feller don't forget."

"Reckon you don't," said Paul.

"Haven't seen the old town in twenty years," said the man. "I guess it ain't changed much."

"These old places don't change much," said Paul with scorn.

"Oh, they ain't so bad to come back to," said the man. "Hate to get chained down in one all my life, though."

"Me too," agreed Paul. "You from around here?"

"Why sure," said the man. "My name's Roudenbush. Any more Roudenbushes around

here that you know of, boy?"

"Place is full of 'em," said Paul. "Hey! You're not the Roudenbush kid that ran away twenty years ago?"

"The very one," said the man. "What happened after I left?"

"Why, they talk about you to this day," said Paul. "Your mother sickened and died, and your pa got up in meetin' a month after you left an' asked forgiveness for treatin' you so mean."

"Poor old feller," said the man. "I guess it was a little rough of me to run out like that. But he asked for it."

"I bet he did."

"This is my wife," said the man.

The woman smiled at Paul again. She did not speak. Paul could not think up what kind of a voice she might have. She leaned forward and opened up the glove compartment. It was cram full of chocolate-covered cherries.

"Been crazy about these ever since I was a kid," said the man. "Help yourself. I got ten pounds of them in the back." He leaned into the leather cushions, took out a silver cigar case, put a cigar between his teeth, and applied a lighter that flamed up like a little bonfire in his hand. "Yes, sir," said the man. "I got two more cars back in the city, and a tuxedo suit with shiny lapels. I made my killing in the stock market, and now I'm president of a

railroad. I'll be getting back there this evening, after I give the folks in the old town a treat."

Paul had a handful of chocolate-covered cherries. "Gee," he said. After that he walked on down the highway. The cherries disappeared and the man and the lady and the car all disappeared, but that didn't matter. "It'll be like that," said young Paul Roudenbush. "It'll be just like that." Then, "I wonder what that lady's name'll be."

A quarter of a mile down the pike was the turnoff to the school, and there was the railroad crossing with its big X on a pole which he always read RAIL CROSSING ROAD. The forenoon freight was bowling down the grade, screaming two longs, a short, and a long. When he was a kid, two years or so back, Paul used to think it saluted him: *Paul . . . Roud . . . n' Bush-h-h . . .* with the final sibilant made visible in the plume of steam on the engine's iron shoulder. Paul trotted up to the crossing and stood just where the first splintered plank met the road surface. Engine, tender, Pennsylvania, Nickel Plate, T. & N. O., Southern, Southern, Pennsylvania, Père Marquette, Canadian Pacific. Cars from all over: hot places, cold places, far places. Automobiles, automobiles, cattle, tank. Tank tank cattle. Refrigerator, refrigerator, automobiles, ca-

boose. Caboose with a red flag flying, and a glimpse at the window of a bull-necked trainman shaving, suds on his jowls like a mad dog. Then the train was a dwindling rectangle on the track, and on its top was the silhouette of a brakeman, leaning easily into wind and velocity, walking on top of the boxcars.

With the train in one ear and dust in the other, Paul faced the highway. A man stood at the other side of the tracks. Paul gaped at him.

He was wearing an old brown jacket with a grey sheepskin collar, and blue dungarees. These he was dusting off with long weather-beaten hands, one of which — the right — looked like a claw. There was no ring-finger or little finger, and a third of the palm's breadth was gone. From the side of the middle finger to the side of the wrist, the hand was neatly sealed

with a type of flexible silvery scar-tissue.

He looked up from his dusting at Paul. "Hi, bub." Either he had a beard or he badly needed a shave. Paul could see the cleft in his square chin, though. The man had eyes as pale as the color of water poured into a glass after the milk had been drunk.

Paul said "Hi," still looking at the hand. The man asked him what that town was over there in the hollow, and Paul told him. He knew now what the man was — one of those fabulous characters who rides on freight trains from place to place. Rides the rods. Catch a fast freight out of Casey, which was K.C., which was Kansas City. They had been everywhere and done everything, these men, and they had a language all their own. Handouts and line bulls, Chi and mulligan and grab a rattler to Nollins.

The man squinched up his eyes



Illustrator: D. Stone

at the town, as if he were trying to drive his gaze through the hill and see more. "The old place hasn't growed none," he said, and spat.

Paul spat too. "Never will," he said.

"You from there?"

"Yup."

"Me too," said the man surprisingly.

"Gosh," said Paul. "You don't look like you came from around here."

The man crossed the single track to Paul's side. "I guess I don't. I been a lot of places since I left here."

"Where you been?" asked Paul.

The man looked into Paul's open eyes, and through them to Paul's open credulousness. "All over the world," he said. "All over this country on freights, and all over the oceans on ships." He bared his right forearm. "Look there." And sure enough he had a tattoo.

"Women," said the man, flexing his claw so that the tattoo writhed. "That's what *I* like." He closed one pale eye, pushed his mouth sidewise under it, and clucked a rapid *chick-chick* from his pale cheek.

Paul wet his lips, spat again, and said, "Yeh. Oh boy."

The man laughed. He had bad teeth. "You're like I was. Wasn't room enough in that town for *me*."

"Me either," said Paul. "I

ain't going back there *no* more."

"Oh, you'll go back. You'll want to look it over, and ask a few questions around, and find out what happened to your old gals, and see how dead everything is, so's you can go away again knowin' you done right to leave in the first place. . . . This here's my second trip back. Seems like every time I go through this part o' the world I just got to drop by here and let the old burg give me a couple laughs." He turned his attention right around and looked outward again. "You really are headin' out, bub?"

"Headin' out," nodded Paul. He liked the sound of that. "Headin' out," he said again.

"Where you bound?"

"The city," Paul said, "unless I hit somethin' I like better 'fore I get there."

The man considered him. "Hey. Got any money?"

Paul shook his head cautiously. He had two dollars and ninety-two cents. The man seemed to make some decision; he shrugged. "Well, good luck, bub. More places you see, more of a man you'll be. Woman told me that once, in Sacramento."

"Th — *oh!*" said Paul. Approaching the grade crossing was a maroon coupe. "It's Mr. Sherman!"

"Who's he?"

"The sheriff. He'll be out lookin' for me!"

"Sheriff! Me for the brush. Don't tag me, you little squirt! Go the other way!" and he dived down the embankment and disappeared into the bushes.

Frightened by the man's sudden harshness, confused by the necessity for instant action, Paul shuffled for a moment, almost dancing, and then ran to the other side. Flat on his stomach in a growth of fireweed, he stopped breathing and peered at the road. The coupe slowed, all but stopped. Paul closed his eyes in terror. Then he heard the grate of gears and the rising whine as the car pulled over the tracks in second gear and moaned on up the highway.

Paul waited five minutes, his fear leaving him exactly as fast as his sweat dried. Then he emerged and hurried along the highway, keeping a sharp watch ahead for the sheriff's returning car. He saw no sign of the man with the claw. But then, he hadn't really expected to.

It could be like that, he thought. Travel this old world over. Gramps used to say that men like that had an itching foot. Paul's feet itched a little, if he thought about it. Hurt a little, too. He could come back years from now with a tattoo and a mutilated hand. Folks'd really take notice. The stories he could tell! "*I run down the bank, see, to haul this tomato out o' th' drink. She was yellin' her blonde*

head off. No sooner got my hooks on her when clompl a alligator takes off part o' me hand. I didn't mind none. Not when I carried this babe up the bank." He shut one eye, pushed his mouth sideways, and clucked. The sound, somehow, reminded him of chocolate-covered cherries. . . .

Another half-mile, and the country became more open. He flicked his eyes from side to side as he trudged. First sign of that maroon coupe and he'd have to fade. "*Sheriff! Me for the brush!*" He felt good. He could keep ahead of the law. Bet your life. Go where you want to go, do what you want to do, come back for a laugh every once in a while. That was better, even, than a big car and a tuxedo suit. Women. A smooth-faced one in the car beside you or *chick-chick!* women all over, Sacramento and every place. to tell you what a man you are, because of all the places you've been. Yup; that was it.

There was a deep drone from overhead. Paul looked up and saw the plane — one of the private planes that based at the airport forty miles away. Planes were no novelty, but Paul never saw one without an expressed wish that something would happen — not necessarily a crash, though that wouldn't be bad, but much rather something that would bring the plane down for a forced landing, so

he could run over and see the pilot get out, and maybe talk to him or even help him fix the trouble. "Let me know next time you're at the field," the pilot would say. . . .

Paul slowed, stopped, then went to the shoulder and sat down with his feet in the dry ditch. He watched the plane. It dipped a wing and circled, went off and came lower, made a run over the meadow. Paul thought he was going to — well, of course he was going to land!

The wheels touched, kicked up a puff of yellow dust that whisked out of existence in the prop-wash. They touched again and held the earth; the tail came down, bounced a little, and then the plane was carrying its wings instead of being carried. The wings were orange and the fuselage was blue, and it was glossy in the sun. The wings wobbled slightly as the plane taxied over the lumpy meadow, and Paul knew that if he held out his arms and wobbled them like that he would feel it in his shoulders.

The motor barked, and the propellor-blades became invisible as the pilot braked one wheel and turned the ship in its own length. The propellor, in profile, was a ghostly band and then a glass disc as the plane swung toward Paul. It snorted and wobbled across the meadow until it was within twenty feet of the fence and the ditch. Then, with a roar, it swung broad-

side to him and the sound of the motor dwindled to an easy *pwap!-tick-tickety-pwap!* while the pilot did knowledgeable things at the controls. Paul could see him in there, plain as day, through the cabin doors. The plane was beautiful; standing still it looked as if it was going two hundred miles an hour. The windshield swept right back over the pilot's head. It was fine.

The pilot opened the door and vaulted to the ground. "Glory be! You'd think they'd have a field built in town after all these years."

"They never will," said Paul. "Nice job you got there."

The pilot, pulling off a pair of high-cuffed gloves, looked briefly at the plane and grinned. He was very clean and had wide shoulders and practically no hips. He wore a good soft leather jacket and tight breeches. "Know anybody in town, son?"

"Everybody, I guess."

"Well, now. I can get all the news from you before I go on in."

"Say — ain't you Paul Roudenbush?"

Paul froze. *He* hadn't said that. There were sudden icy cramps in the backs of his knees. The plane vanished. The pilot vanished. Paul sat with his feet in the dry ditch and slowly turned his head.

A maroon coupe stood by the ditch. Its door was open, and

there, one foot on the running-board, was Mr. Sherman. *Sheriff? Me for the brush!*

Instead, he licked his lips and said, "Hi, Mr. Sherman."

"My," said Mr. Sherman, "you give me a turn, you did. Saw you sitting there so still, figured you'd been hit by a car or some such."

"I'm all right," said Paul faintly. He rose. Might as well get it over with. "I was just . . . thinkin', I guess."

Thinking—and now he was caught, and the thoughts raced through him like the cars of the forenoon freight; thoughts from hot places, cold places, far places. Stock-market, car, claw claw plane. Women, women, cigarette-lighter, landing field. Thoughts that were real, thoughts that he made up; they barrelled on through him, with a roar and a swirl, and left him standing, facing the highway, and Mr. Sherman, who had caught him.

"Thinking, eh? Well, I'm right relieved," said Mr. Sherman. He got back in the car, slammed the door, stepped on the starter.

"Mr. Sherman—ain't you—"

"Ain't I what, son?"

"Nothin', Mr. Sherman. Nothin' at all."

"You're a weird one," said Mr. Sherman, shaking his head. "Hey, I'm heading back into town. Want a lift? It's near eating time."

"No, thanks," said Paul immediately and with great sincerity.

Paul watched the maroon coupe move off, his mind racing. The car was going into town. Without him. Mr. Sherman did not know he was running away. Why not? Well, they hadn't missed him yet. Unless . . . unless they didn't care whether he came back or not. No. No, that couldn't be! The car would go right past his house, soon's it got in town. Wasn't much of a house. In it, though, was his own room. Small, but absolutely his own.

The trouble with the other ways to go back, it took time to make a killing in the stock-market and get married. It took time to acquire a plane. It probably took quite a while to get part of your hand cut off. But this way—

Suddenly he was in the road screaming, "Mr. Sherman! Mr. Sherman!"

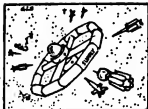
Mr. Sherman didn't hear him but he saw him in the rear-view mirror. He stopped and backed up a bit. Paul climbed in, gasped his thanks, and sat still, working on his wind. He got it all back just about the time they turned into the Township Road.

Mr. Sherman glanced abruptly at the boy. "Paul."

"Yessir."

"I just had a thought. You, way out there on the pike; were you running away?"

Paul said "No." His eyes were more puzzled than anything else. "I was coming back," he said.



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